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Vol. XXXVII.

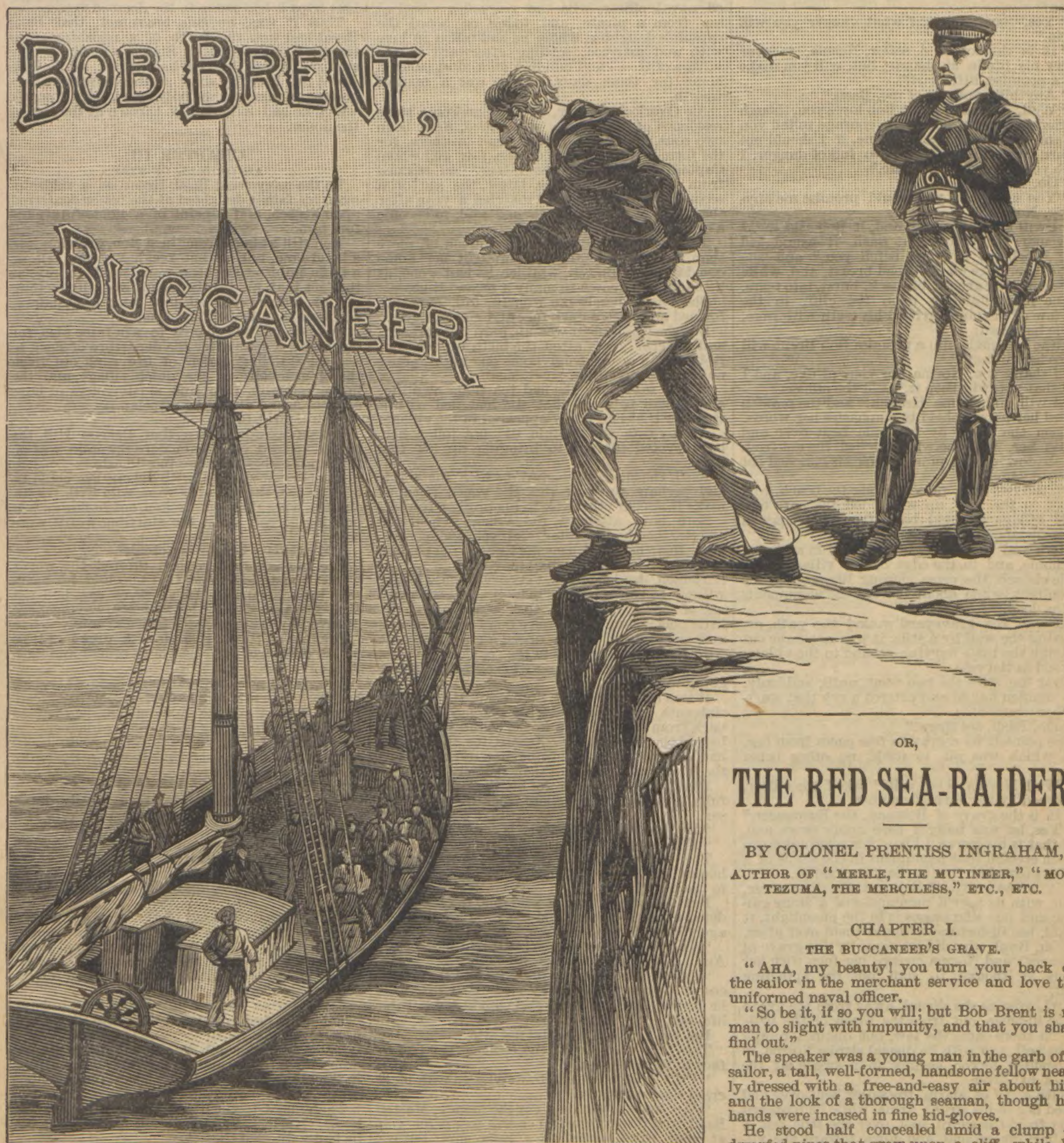
Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,

98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y., December 7, 1887.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5 00 a Year.

No. 476



MORDECAI TURNED, SALUTED THE BUCCANEER CHIEF, AND THEN SPRUNG FROM THE CLIFF.

OR,

THE RED SEA-RAIDER.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MON-
TEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE BUCCANEER'S GRAVE.

"AHA, my beauty! you turn your back on the sailor in the merchant service and love the uniformed naval officer.

"So be it, if so you will; but Bob Brent is no man to slight with impunity, and that you shall find out."

The speaker was a young man in the garb of a sailor, a tall, well-formed, handsome fellow neatly dressed with a free-and-easy air about him and the look of a thorough seaman, though his hands were incased in fine kid-gloves.

He stood half concealed amid a clump of dwarfed pines that grew upon a cliff, while he shook his clinched fist toward two persons who

were not twenty paces from him, standing upon the beach, with the moonlight streaming down upon them and the surf breaking in snow and diamond spray at their feet.

The two persons, against whom a threat was thrown from between the shut teeth of the one upon the cliff, were a young man in the dress of an officer of the United States Navy, and a maiden whose face, turned up to his, was revealed in all of its innocent beauty by the moonlight.

It was a face to see and never forget, so full was it of intense feeling, rare loveliness and innocence, while the form, clad in a dress white as snow, was the perfection of symmetry.

She stood facing her companion, and looking straight up into his face while she uttered the words that, though music to his ears, were like curses to those of the man on the cliff:

"Basil, you have asked me if I love you, and I tell you that I do with my whole heart and soul. I thought that I loved your brother Bob, he was so kind to me, so noble, and yet, when I met you I felt that I was mistaken, that I had not known what love was before."

"One moment, Norma, while I ask you if Bob ever told you of his love?"

"No, Basil, not by words; but in actions, yes."

"He never asked you to be his wife?"

"No, Basil."

"Then, Norma, I will ask you to be mine, as you tell me that you love me—yes, and have shown to me that you do."

"Will you be my wife, Norma, when I come back from the cruise I am now about to start upon?"

"Yes, Basil; but oh! what danger you will be in."

"It is the lot of a sailor, Norma, to ever carry his life in his hands; but, will you make me a promise, little girl?"

"Anything you ask of me, Basil."

"Well, Norma, I know Bob loves you, though he may never have had the courage to tell you so, and if aught happens to me, if I should not return from this expedition, so full of danger, I wish you to become his wife."

"Oh, Basil!"

"You said that you would promise me anything, Norma."

"I will keep my word, and, if Bob asks me, I will marry him; but oh! Basil, it would kill me, I believe, if harm befell you," and she buried her face on his broad breast, and, while her arms stole around his neck, burst, into tears.

The man standing upon the cliff, in the shadow of the pines, gritted his teeth with rage, while he hissed:

"She has made him a promise Bob Brent will force her to keep!"

"I thank you, Norma, for your pledge, and I feel that you will keep it," said the officer.

"I will, so help me Heaven!" and the maiden raised her hand upheld to emphasize her words.

Then the lover by her side bent over and kissed her, while he who watched the act from the shadow of the pines, shook his clinched fist in silent rage.

On the two then passed, along the beach, to a break in the cliff, up which led the path to a little village situated back from the coast a short distance.

Here and there a light twinkled in an humble home, and in the edge of the village was a little church, the cross shining like gold in the moonlight, while about it were the monuments of the dead.

Around the graveyard wound the path, or, crossing the wall by a stile, it was a nearer cut through the little burying-ground to the village beyond in the vale.

Over the stile the two went, until, suddenly, the maiden halted and uttered a cry that startled her companion.

"Oh, Basil, see there!"

She pointed to a grave a few paces from her, and which was off to itself, no other being near.

"Well, Norma, what is it?" asked the officer, disturbed by her earnest manner.

"It is the grave of Belmont, the Buccaneer."

"Yes, he was hanged here many years ago, and that is his grave, I know, for some unknown person erected that monument in the shape of a gallows over him," said the young sailor.

"It is the grave of Belmont, the Buccaneer, Basil, with its horrid monument of a stone gallows, and one who passes it in the moonlight, it is said, has ill-fortune to haunt them ever after."

"Oh, Basil, why did we come by this grave of ill-omen?" and Norma crossed her face with her hands as though to shut out the appalling sight.

And, even as she shrunk away from the grave of the ill-omen, out from the tower of the little church there came the low, but distinct tolling of the bell, and with its dismal stroke Norma, in her sudden terror, shrunk in a swoon at the feet of her lover.

With a cry of alarm, the sailor bent over and raised her in his strong arms, while he hastened away from the weird spot, over the stile, out of the burying-ground, and down toward the village.

But the low, deep tolling of the bell still rung

in his ears, as though to tell him that the ill-fortune that befell those who passed the grave of Belmont, the Buccaneer, in the moonlight, must also fall to his lot.

CHAPTER II.

THE TWO BROTHERS.

THE two most prominent families in the village of G—, on the Massachusetts coast, were, at the time of which I write, in the first years of the present century, the Spragues and the Brents.

The representatives of the former family were a father and daughter, and the old "Commodore," as the former was called, was the richest man by far in those parts, for he had a dozen ships at sea, plying between American and foreign ports.

He had lost a leg himself, while commanding an American privateer in the War of the Revolution, so had retired to his home of Beacon Hill, bringing with him a young wife and child, he having married in the West Indies, and he was content to watch his interests afloat and ashore and treasure up his gold for his young daughter Norma, for his wife died a year after coming to Beacon Hill to live.

Beacon Hill was a stone mansion, large and comfortable, and though it overlooked the village, the harbor and the sea in front, in the rear were a hundred well-cultivated acres that belonged to it and proved no small revenue to the commodore.

The Brent family were not of the merchant-marine, but came of a naval family.

The American founder had been a distinguished naval officer, who had rescued a vessel at sea from a pirate, and found on board the captain's daughter, whom he had fallen in love with and married, settling afterward in the village of G— and building an almost palatial home for those days, for he was a man of wealth.

At Overlook Manor, as the handsome stone residence of the Brents was called, were born two sons, Basil and Robert, half-brothers, for the former was the son of the fair girl whom Captain Basil Brent, the father, had rescued from the pirate, and the latter, the son of a second wife whom he had married a year after the death of his first, as he had said, to become a nurse for his little boy.

This second wife no one knew much of, more than that the captain had brought her home one day from Boston, whither he had gone, as he had made known to many a second time.

She was a handsome woman, tall, superbly formed and with a dark face and glorious eyes.

But she was a silent woman, hard to approach, and several years after the birth of her son, Robert, ran away from home one night, going no one knew whither.

It was said that she had taken her own life, and others believed that she had fled with a stranger that had lately appeared in the village.

At any rate the captain did not follow her, but devoted himself to bringing up his two sons.

Basil, the elder, he seemed to love the most, and perhaps aware of this the youth tried to make it appear otherwise to his brother Robert.

Both boys attended the village school for awhile, then had a tutor, and yet, while cramming their heads with classic lore did not neglect their bodily training, for they became expert horsemen, dead shots, and perfect sailors, being willing to row a boat or man a craft with any one of the hardy seamen that sailed out of the little port, though they were but boys in years, and one night of storm urged a crew to go out with them in a life-boat to the rescue of a vessel which had struck on the reef outside and was going to pieces.

It was a fearful night, and Basil, then in his sixteenth year, was returning home on horseback from a jaunt back in the country, when he beheld the vessel driving ashore, for the beacon had been struck by lightning, and those on board the fated craft knew not their danger.

Dashing his spurs into his horse, he rode at full speed down to the shore, shouting as he did so:

"Ho, lads! a vessel-of-war is coming ashore."

"Follow me to the rescue!"

The brave villagers came out of their cosy homes, and, enveloped in their storm suits, ran to the beach.

But the storm was a wild one, the sea thundered upon the beach, and the wind howled savagely over the land and sea.

"There! she has struck! Hear those cries! And hark! that gun pleads for help."

"Come, lads, man the life-boat and to the rescue of the craft off shore!" cried Basil Brent, as he sprang from his horse and caught hold of the life-boat.

But the group of men did not stir.

They too well knew the danger they had to face in that wild sea.

"Fifty dollars each to those who go with me!" cried Basil excitedly.

"We know you has got the money, Master Basil, and if not your father will pay it for you at your word, while it's a snug sum; but we would but go to our death, sir," said an old sailor.

"No, men, no! the life-boat is stanch, your arms are strong and your hearts brave, so man the boat, lads, man the life-boat!"

The men shook their heads; and then, following a red flash out on the sea came the deep boom of a gun.

"Ho, lads! does not that brazen cry for help touch your hearts?"

"Come with me, I beg of you!"

As Basil spoke up dashed his brother, Bob Brent, as he was familiarly called.

"I will go with you, Basil," he cried, hearing the last words of his brother.

"And who else dare go when boys lead?" cried Basil.

"I for one, for I know you are a good one, Master Basil," cried a seaman.

"And I go where Duncan dare go," said another.

"Count me with you, Master Basil."

"And me!"

"I go, too!"

And thus the crew of sixteen oarsmen were made up, and the life-boat was launched through the surf, Basil Brent at the helm and Bob in the bows, holding a large ship's lantern, which threw its glare far ahead out over the seething waters.

On, on they went, struggling, fighting for life and against death, and at last the vessel was reached.

It was a small armed schooner, bearing an admiral to his fleet, and when the day dawned, the craft had gone to pieces where she struck; but nearly every officer and man had been rescued by the life-boat in the half-dozen perilous trips it had made to the doomed vessel.

Thus it was, by this brave act, that Basil Brent had won the berth of a midshipman in the navy of the United States, sent him by the admiral whose life he had saved, while Bob Brent had been, by some strange oversight, forgotten, or remembered only by a golden reward, which he had indignantly thrown at the feet of the donor.

CHAPTER III.

AN ORDEAL OF FIRE.

To the navy went Basil Brent as a midshipman, his father delighted at the honor conferred upon his son, and hopeful of a noble future before him.

And still at home remained Bob, growing into a handsome, but withal reckless young fellow, a trifle embittered, folks were wont to say, at the fact that his brother had won distinction, and his father regarded him with less kindness and love than he held for Basil.

But Bob had his chance to win fame also, for one night, a year after the departure of Basil to sea, the startling alarm of fire rung out from the church-bells in the quiet village, and the brave voices of men and shrill voices of boys sent the sound along the streets:

"Fire! fire! fire!"

It soon became known that Beacon Hill, the old homestead of Commodore Sprague, was on fire, and thither men ran in all haste.

The old commodore, with his one leg, could be of little use, the servants were wild with fright, and the wing that had broken out in flames was burning fiercely when the startling words were heard:

"My God! where is my child?"

The old commodore had uttered the words when he had discovered that his child, his beautiful little Norma of ten years of age, had not been brought from the mansion, having been deserted by the panic-stricken servants.

Brave men turned pallid with dread at this, for no one dared face that fiery ordeal and dash to the rescue.

Yes, there was one, and he, seizing a blanket, had dashed it into a bucket of water to saturate it, and then, throwing it about him, had rushed into the burning wing of the fine old home.

A wild cry of fear and admiration commingled arose at this daring act, and then came ringing cheers as a man shouted:

"It is Bob Brent!"

Then all was silence, for men hardly dared move or speak, while they waited in dire suspense.

Above the crackling of the flames, a childish voice was heard shrieking:

"Save me! oh, save me!"

No answer came, and all was silence once more.

Then there dashed out of the wing a tottering form, and in his arms he carried a heavy weight enveloped in a blanket, and men shouted themselves hoarse as Bob Brent thrust little Norma Sprague into her father's arms and then fell his full length upon the green grass.

Little Norma was not hurt, more than to have her tender flesh reddened like scarlet by the flames, and she cried:

"Don't let poor Bob die, for he rushed through flames to save me, and then wrapped me all up in the blanket and did not try to protect himself!"

The village doctor had Bob Brent borne to his home, Overlook Manor, and his father cried, for he had witnessed the act:

"Well done, brave boy!"

A change in the wind saved the rest of the

mansion of the old commodore from burning, for the sailors from the ships in port worked with a will, and but one wing was destroyed, though the stout stone walls still stood; but it was many a long day before Bob Brent was able to go out again, for he had well-nigh lost his life in saving Norma from the fearful fate that would have been hers but for his magnificent pluck.

His handsome, reckless face was not scarred, but his hair had been burnt off by the flames, and his shoulders, arms, hands and feet had been burnt to blisters.

Yet he rallied from the severe ordeal through which he had passed, and in a few months was as sound as ever, excepting the honorable scars which yet remained upon his feet and hands.

It was thought that Captain Brent felt more kindly toward his son Bob after this exhibition of his nerve and daring; but the youth kept to himself just how his father treated him, and at times a bitter expression upon his face alone seemed to indicate that he was not happy.

At Beacon Hill Bob became a most welcome visitor, and the old commodore seemed to regard him as fondly as though he was his own son.

He never tired of talking of how he had saved Norma from death, facing a fearful death which no man had dared face, and when he had the wing of the house rebuilt he had over the door a brass plate put bearing the inscription:

"This wing was destroyed by fire on the night of September 15th, 18—, and in its ashes would have been the grave of Norma Sprague, but for the courage of

BOB BRENT, A BRAVE BOY,

who, at the risk of his own life, and though terribly burned in the act, rescued her from the burning building, and hence deserves this tablet to his splendid pluck."

This part of the building was known after that as "Bob's Wing," and in it was the old commodore's "cabin," as he called his favorite sitting-room, while his bedchamber was adjoining.

Giving up his tutor when he was seventeen years of age, Bob Brent devoted himself almost wholly to cruising about at will, after going as mate of a coaster for a run to New York or Boston, and now and then taking a voyage to the West Indies in one of Commodore Sprague's vessels.

His father was a stern man, remaining always at home, and allowed him to do pretty much as he pleased.

He had about him his books for indoor enjoyment, and his horse, guns and dogs afforded him outdoor sport when he wished it, while now and then he would run down to Boston alone in a little pleasure craft of two tons burden which he had had built for his own use, and, as he so pleased himself he allowed Bob to do likewise.

Word came every few months from Basil, and it was encouraging, for he had several times been mentioned in dispatches sent home, for gallant conduct, and his former sea training having been of great service to him, he had been selected from among his fellow-middies to act as junior lieutenant where one was needed.

Captain Brent had always been considered a rich man, and so it was a surprise, when he died suddenly one night seated in his chair in his library, to find that Overlook Manor was about all that could be found of his estates.

He was buried in the village churchyard, and Bob Brent had followed his father's body to the grave and then returned to his home, made desolate by death.

He could find no debts against the estate, and yet no other property or money, other than a few hundred dollars in gold, and there was no will left that could be discovered.

So Bob dismissed all the servants except an old man and his wife, and felt that he must go to work to earn a living.

Just then Commodore Sprague wanted a mate for a West Indian trader that he owned, and he offered the berth to Bob Brent, and it was promptly accepted.

Thus it was that he became a sailor, and when he reached his twenty-third year was in command of one of the fleetest craft that sailed the seas, and it was his own, for he had paid for its building with the money he had earned.

It was upon his return from his first voyage in his new craft that he found his brother Basil had arrived at Overlook Manor, and had been for a month an occupant of his boyhood's home, and glad was he to welcome him back again, for he had not seen him since he had left, years before, to become a midshipman in the navy.

CHAPTER IV.

A SHADOW COMES BETWEEN.

OVERLOOK MANOR, after the death of its master, had been allowed to go pretty much to ruin, excepting the wing in which dwelt Robert Brent, when he was at home, and the two old servants.

It is true, that its massive stone walls would not crumble away, but then, deserted and left pretty much to itself, the old place wore a look of sad desolation.

Belonging to his brother and himself, Bob

Brent had been willing to let it remain as it was until Basil's return, when they could decide what was best to be done.

About it Bob Brent had his own ideas, and he was trying to save up money enough to purchase his brother's share and then fit it up as the home of a bride he hoped to take there some day.

That bride was Norma Sprague, growing in loveliness of face and form each year, and promising to be a woman of wondrous beauty.

Her father idolized her, and heaped upon her all that money could buy to add to her happiness and make her an accomplished young lady.

For some reason Bob Brent argued in his own heart that Norma rightfully belonged to him.

He had saved her from being burned to death when a child; he was said to be the pluckiest and handsomest young sailor out of G—, and he had some property, while he sung a good song, could dance a hornpipe with the best, and had a fair education.

What could a girl want more in a lover? he wondered.

The old commodore was fond of Bob Brent too, and he did not see any other young gallant to whom he would prefer to give his daughter than the one who had risked his life to save her from death, and more, still bore cruel scars upon his hands, feet and shoulders of his daring act.

Sensitive about his scars, Bob Brent was wont to wear gloves continually, and as he dressed handsomely and took great pride in his personal appearance, he was called the "Dandy Sea Dog," and the "Kid Glove Sailor" by his mates.

Norma Sprague seemed also to like Bob Brent immensely, and she seemed to consider it as a matter of course that some day she would marry him.

He had never told her he loved her, nor asked for her heart and hand in return for his own, but it seemed to be understood by all that they were as good as engaged, and young gallants fought shy of Norma, for Bob Brent was known to be a bad man to arouse and his jealousy had shown itself on several occasions.

And all this time Basil Brent was winning fame as a daring, dashing, officer, and had risen to be a lieutenant, his promotions having been won by his pluck and skill.

One day Bob Brent got a letter from Boston, and it told him that his brother was coming home within a few days.

He fixed up the wing in the old mansion, to make him as comfortable as possible, and laid in a supply of provisions to feast him on; but yet he did not seem happy when Norma said:

"I am so anxious to see your brother, Bob, for he is so brave, and so handsome, the papers say."

"He is a splendid fellow, and I will be glad to see him home, for we have grown from boyhood to manhood since last we saw each other," Bob Brent remarked, and yet the words of Norma had set him to thinking.

"What if she should love him and cast me adrift?" he said as he walked home that night.

Two days after Basil Brent arrived, coming by stage from Boston.

As he was put out at the village inn Norma Sprague was passing with her father, and the eyes of the two met, while his uniform betraying who he was, the old commodore stepped forward and grasped his hand with the remark:

"Welcome home, Master Basil Brent, after long years of sea-roving, and I hope you have not forgotten the old commodore of Beacon Hill?"

"No, indeed, Commodore Sprague, I have not forgotten you," was the hearty response, and Basil Brent grasped the old sailor's hand most warmly.

He was then presented to Norma, who blushed as she met his eyes, and the three walked on together, after Basil had ordered his luggage sent up to Overlook.

"Bob did not expect you by stage, Lieutenant Brent, so was not down to meet you; but you'll find him up at Overlook," said the commodore, as they walked up the street, for their way lay together until they came to the turn in the highway above the village.

Norma was silent during the walk, but her brain was busy.

She saw that the young officer was a perfect Apollo in form, and possessed a face that, though much like his brother's, was yet one to win a heart more readily.

His manners were elegant, and he did not seem to have been spoiled by the fame he had won, as he told the commodore:

"Don't call me Lieutenant Brent, please, as I am still Basil at home, sir."

Just as they reached the turn where they parted to go to their respective homes, Bob was seen approaching, and a moment after the hands of the brothers clasped in a warm, affectionate greeting.

"Bob, you splendid old fellow, you have grown as handsome as an Adonis, and I'll wager half the girls in the village are in love with you," said Basil, as the two went on together, after parting with the commodore and Norma.

"Ah, no, Basil, I don't know one that loves

me; but how glad I am to see you home again, though the old home looks desolate now, and only old Berry and his wife, Jule, are there; but we can make you comfortable, though I fear I have got to run off for a few days, as I have parties in Boston who wish to see me on special business."

Arriving at Overlook, Basil Brent saw that it did indeed look desolate.

Many years had gone by since last he saw the dear old place, his father lay in the churchyard down toward the shore, and he and Bob were all that were left.

He knew, by letters received, that his father had left no will, and therefore Bob and himself were joint heirs of the mansion and the estate; but he had no need of money, as he had a snug sum saved up of prize-money, from the capture of pirate craft in the Southern seas.

That night he slept in his own room, and it was a long time before slumber came to him.

"Dear old Bob, what a splendid-looking man he has made, and he has worked his way up to the command of a brig by his own will and pluck."

"I wonder he has never fallen in love with that pretty girl, Norma Sprague, whose life he saved; but he told me that he was not engaged."

The next morning Basil Brent slept late, and when he went out to the tempting breakfast which the old housekeeper Jule had ready for him, he learned with regret that Bob had been forced to take the early stage to Boston, but would be back within ten days.

Then Basil began to go about among his old friends, and a royal welcome he received from those who remembered the plucky boy who had won his epaulettes from saving the crew of the wrecked schooner.

But Basil seemed to find Beacon Hill the most attractive place to visit, for he went there often, and Norma volunteered to show him around.

So they rode together about the country, walked together through the village, the shady lanes and fields, and sailed on the waters of the harbor in Bob's little yacht.

People shook their heads when they saw them together, for how would it all end they wondered.

And Bob was detained by his business in Boston for several weeks; but at last he returned home and then a score of tongues wagged with the news that he had been cut out by his brother Basil, to whom Norma Sprague now seemed more devoted than she ever had been to him.

"I will watch them and see for myself," he said, through his shut teeth.

And watch them he did, and what he saw and heard the reader has seen, and it brought a shadow, one that could never drift away, between the two brothers, a shadow that must gloom their future lives.

CHAPTER V.

GAMBLING FOR A FORTUNE.

BOB BRENT was a man who loved gold.

He was generous, spent his money freely, and yet he was a man who was determined to be possessed of a fortune.

The fact that his father had left nothing more than Overlook, to be divided between himself and brother, had been a great disappointment to him.

He had hoped to be rich, and seeing no other chance to gain riches at once, he determined to try what gambling would do for him.

So he began to play in secret, going up to Boston to gamble, and also risking large sums when in Southern ports, but never allowing the fact to be known, so that at home he was considered a most exemplary young man.

On one occasion, some two years before the return home of Basil Brent, Bob had been playing one night in Boston, with a stranger whom he had met in a gambling salon there.

The stranger had the appearance of being a gentleman, was bronzed faced, as though he had followed the sea, and was perhaps forty years of age.

Other than that his name was Captain Conrad, and that he said he was a retired shipping merchant, Bob Brent knew nothing of him, though he had several times met him in the salon and joined him in a game of cards, the stranger seeming always to win.

Anxious to get money to build for himself a vessel, and also to lay aside for the purchase of his brother's share in Overlook, Bob Brent had determined to risk the earnings of his two last voyages in his endeavor to win largely.

But luck was against him, and he not only lost his money to Captain Conrad, but also recklessly continued playing until he had given his notes for a larger sum than he knew all that he possessed in the world would bring.

Arising from the table he was in despair, for how could he hide his gambling from the people at G—, and the commodore and Norma would know it, for Captain Conrad, to his amazement, had said:

"I will run down to your town, Mr. Brent, and collect your note when due."

Bob had not told him where he lived and was surprised at this, and frightened at the

prospect of the stranger going there blurted out:

"Don't you do it, for you'll ruin me, and I'm no man to be driven to the wall and not resent it."

"Ah! is it so bad as that?" said the stranger, quickly.

"Yes, and worse, for you hold notes that every dollar I can raise on what I own will not pay."

"I am surprised that you should give notes for what you cannot pay," said Captain Conrad, with a look of surprise.

"Desperation causes one to do many things which otherwise he would not do."

"I hoped each time to win back what I had lost and so continued playing upon my notes, which you took."

"Believing them honorable paper, of course: but, my dear sir, suppose I tell you I can see a way out of your desperate situation."

"Ah! and what may that be?" eagerly asked Bob Brent.

"To tell you, I must feel that I can trust you."

"I assure you that you can, sir."

"It will be a great secret that I confide to you, one of life or death, and I take no risks lightly."

"You are a sailor, I believe?"

"I am."

"You command a vessel running between the United States ports and the West Indies?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I can help you, and more, I can make your fortune for you."

"In what way?" and Bob Brent lost his usual indifferent manner and became considerably excited.

"That is my secret."

"And you will tell it sure?"

"Upon conditions."

"Name them."

"You wish to make a fortune?"

"Of course I do."

"You have given me notes to cover all you own and more too?"

"Unfortunately yes, in the excitement of losing and hoping to win back what I had lost."

"You have done so, no matter what the intention, and I can ruin you, if so I wished: but I will not do so, as I like you, and you can help me, thus helping yourself."

"Now I am, like yourself a sailor, and I command a small coaster that brings me in a snug revenue."

"I have a plan now by which my income can be largely increased, and it is through you."

"If you agree to the terms I have to offer, I shall to-night return to you all of my winnings from you, and we can become partners in my scheme: but you must agree to it before I make known what it is."

"Is it to break the law?"

"You have just broken the law in giving me notes you could not pay, so are you particular as to whether you can do so again, when there is big money in it?"

"I do not care to do anything wrong."

"As you please, Captain Brent; I will look elsewhere for a mate to help me in my little scheme."

"My lawyer will see you at your home in regard to the I. O. U.'s I hold of yours."

"Good-night, sir," and the strange man raised his hat and turned away.

"One moment please," and Bob Brent hastened after him.

"Well, sir?"

"You wish me to pledge myself to serve you?"

"And yourself."

"And a fortune is the result?"

"It is."

"What are the risks?"

"You do not look like a coward, sir, in spite of your dressing like a dandy and wearing kid gloves at all times."

"I am no coward, and hence I am willing to risk what any other man dare do."

"You look it, sir."

"If I accept your terms you will return me my notes?"

"Yes, upon your oath to become my partner in the secret enterprise I have on hand."

"I agree," and Bob Brent held forth his hand and the stranger grasped it.

The fly was in the spider's web.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MIDNIGHT MEETING.

If the good people of G— wondered at the rapid increase that Bob Brent made in his fortune, they deemed it earned in a legitimate way.

He was a thorough seaman, and Commodore Sprague was more than pleased with him while he was one of his officers, for he had shown great business tact, and sold many a cargo for him at a large profit.

When Bob became master of his own vessel, which he had had built after a model of his own drawing, and had paid for, he took a notion to trade at various ports as suited him best.

His new vessel was a brig, and she was saucy-enough looking to be a pirate, while her sailing qualities were the marvel of all sailors who had seen her fly along over the waters, either in a stiff or light breeze.

Bob Brent had named her the Golden Hope, through some odd fancy of his own, and thus disappointed many, who had supposed she would have been called the Norma Sprague.

For some other reason best known to himself, he had shipped his crew away from G—, thus overlooking many a young sailor who would liked to have gone with him, and, instead of making that port his starting-point and harborage, he had gone to Boston to get his cargoes, and also brought back return freight to that city.

If any one thought it strange on his part, to get a crew elsewhere, and to trade away from G—, they could only see in it an odd humor of the young sailor commander, and as his vessel was his own, he could do as he pleased.

He certainly made his voyages pay well, for he had purchased certain property in G— and was said to own more in Boston while he also had a snug sum laid by in the bank.

Thus matters stood when Basil Brent returned home.

As fortune would have it, the Golden Hope was in the dry dock undergoing repairs, when Basil returned home, and thus Bob could be much with his brother, he hoped.

But it will be remembered that he left for Boston the next day after Basil's arrival, and was gone for several weeks.

All this time love was playing sad havoc with the hearts of Basil Brent and Norma Sprague.

Had Bob been at home perhaps Basil would have discovered that he loved Norma, and that she cared for the brave fellow who had saved her life; but Norma did not show this, and so, hearing nothing, for Basil Brent was not a man to approach with gossip, he allowed himself to become infatuated with the little beauty, and though he had wondered why his brother and the maiden had never fallen in love with each other, he did not trouble himself about the matter.

So when Bob Brent returned home he was warmly welcomed by his brother Basil.

Bob had caught a few rumors in the village, as he returned, of how matters were going; but it was late when he arrived and he hastened home at once.

Basil had just come in, and after greeting him warmly said:

"I was over at Beacon Hill, and would have met you, Bob, if you had dropped me a line when you were coming."

"I was not certain when I could come, for I have been detained upon a matter of importance, of which I wish to speak to you, Basil."

"Certainly, Bob; but you look worried."

"I am; but it does not matter."

"If I can help you in any way command me."

"You can, for I wish you to sell me your share of Overlook estate."

Basil fairly started, while he said:

"Sell you my share of dear old Overlook, Bob?"

"Yes, and I will pay you your price cash for it."

"You have done well indeed, Bob, to be able to pay cash for half of Overlook and its belongings, for I was offered for it in Boston, as I came through town on my way home, fifty thousand dollars."

"It is not worth it; but I will give you half the sum for your share?"

"No, I will not sell it, as it was my father's wish that I should keep the place and make it my home, so I will pay you for your share, Bob, though I am not able to pay so large a sum in cash, not having been so prosperous as you have been."

"I will not sell my share, and I will pay you even more for yours."

"How does the matter stand, Bob, for other than that father left nothing more than Overlook I know absolutely not a word."

"He left no will, and only Overlook and its belongings, with a few hundred dollars."

"Bob, I fear I have something to say that may pain you, if father left no will; but beforehand I will tell you again I will pay you twenty-five thousand dollars for half of Overlook."

"I will not take it, for I wish to make it my home, as I hope soon to settle down and quit the sea."

"Bob, are you aware that you have no claim upon Overlook?"

"What do you mean?"

"It was built on land belonging to my mother, and with my mother's money, for father invested his riches elsewhere."

"As he left no will of course I am the only heir to Overlook, as the deeds will show, all being in my mother's name; but still I repeat I will pay you half as though you held a claim upon it; but I will not sell Overlook, as I shall some day return here to live myself."

Bob Brent turned very pale.

He knew that it could only be as Basil said, that his mother, their father's second wife, held no claim upon Overlook, and he had not a

dollar's interest in it, for all belonged to his half-brother.

He had not looked into the matter, nor had his lawyer told him.

But it was true, and he knew it now.

The generous offer of Basil, under other circumstances he would have appreciated.

Now he did not.

He had heard that Basil had won Norma Sprague from him, and now he knew that the home, which he had builded up in his mind to own and make a grand place, bringing Norma there as his wife, was not his.

His ambition and his hopes seemed crushed at one fell blow.

He had always been a trifle envious of their father's love for Basil being stronger than for him, and now the old feeling of envy came back in full force.

But he did not show his emotion, other than by the deep pallor that came upon his face.

He was silent for some moments, and then said:

"Basil, I believe you are right, but I never thought of it in that light, so supposed I was half-owner in Overlook."

"And so you are, as to its money value; but I will not sell the place, Bob."

"I do not wish that which is not my own, but I do want Overlook, and I will give you for it sixty thousand dollars in cash."

"Why, Bob, are you a millionaire?" laughed Basil.

"I am able to pay the sum I offer you, and you shall have it to-morrow, Basil."

"No, I will not sell it, Bob, under any consideration, and I shall insist upon paying you the sum I named; but I wish several years to do it in, for I am not as rich as you seem to be."

"Oh, I am comfortable," was the indifferent reply.

"So it seems, and far more, as you can pay sixty thousand in cash, own property here and in Boston, and also own one of the finest vessels in the merchant service."

"You are a very rich man, Bob, and I congratulate you with all my heart."

"Thank you," said Bob Brent, coldly; and then he added:

"Well, let the matter rest as it is for the present, and now listen while I tell you a little plan I wish your aid in."

"Yes."

"I had it come to me, while I was in Boston, that there is a pirate craft hiding on the Maine coast and repairing damages."

"She has about sixty men, carries ten guns, and when I tell you her commander you will know well that he will be a valuable prize—he and his ship."

"Who is he, Bob?"

"His name is Brazos."

"Ha! Brazos, the Mexican Buccaneer?"

"Yes."

"There is a large price offered for his head, dead or alive, and for the capture of his swift schooner, the Red Sea-Raider, as he calls the craft."

"Yes, and he is now repairing damages in a snug hiding-place that I know of, for one of his men, a captive forced to serve him, escaped and came to me two days ago, the man having served on my vessel and been kidnapped in the West Indies."

"Now, my brig is not ready to go, but we can get a craft here and a good crew, you taking command and I acting as your first officer, and we can capture the craft. What do you say?"

"You should command, Bob, as it is your game."

"No, I would rather not be known in the affair, as it will cause all the Gulf buccaneers to make me their especial game, if one of their outlaw comrades hangs through my agency."

"You lead, and I will simply go as a support to you, and you must not tell a soul how you got your information."

"I will keep the secret, Bob, and we will get a vessel to-morrow and ship our crew; but how about guns?"

"You will have to take her by boarding, or with the boats, for she cannot fight you, as she is moored ashore and grounded, I believe."

"All right; but I can get a cruiser in Boston, if you deem it best."

"No, there is not a vessel-of-war there, nor in Portland, for I asked about this, while it would be as well to let our lads here get the fame and prize-money for themselves."

"You are right; but we must have fully seventy men, and plenty of small arms."

"We can get ninety men, and we will send them, for there must be no mistake."

"You can get the men here, and they can arm themselves; but remember, this is knowledge brought to you, and I am not to be brought into the matter."

"As you please, Bob," was the reply, and soon after the two brothers parted, for it was long after midnight.

But Bob Brent did not retire to rest, for his heart and brain seemed on fire, and all through the night he paced the floor of his room, while the look upon his face was one hard to fathom.

CHAPTER VII.

CAST ADRIFT.

THE reader will recall the opening chapter of this story, when the love scene happened upon the beach, half a mile from the little village of G—, between Basil Brent and Norma Sprague?

It will be remembered that there was an eavesdropper who not only heard what was said, but saw all, as he stood upon the cliff, hidden by a clump of pines, and had his eyes fixed upon the two, so plainly visible in the moonlight.

That one, in his dress of a "sailor exquisite," and his fine kid gloves and jaunty tarpaulin, was Bob Brent, now better known to the reader as the captain of his own pretty brig, the Golden Hope.

It was the day following the scene between the two brothers in the library of Overlook Manor, and Basil Brent had gotten a suitable craft for his move against Brazos, the Red Raider, and shipped a hundred gallant young tars most anxious to follow his lead upon any expedition of danger, though they had not been told what it was.

The craft was to sail the next night, for all could not be gotten in readiness before, and Basil, as sunset drew near, had asked Norma to accompany him for a walk along the beach.

The sun had gone down, and the moon arose in all its beauty from beyond the watery horizon, and still the two walked on, for they meant to return across the little cemetery north of the village and thus follow the ridge road around to Beacon Hill.

Little they dreamed that their steps had been dogged, and especially by Bob Brent.

He had seen the way they took and so went to the little burying-ground, knowing that they would return that way.

Then, as they still lingered on the beach, he had gone to the cliff.

He only wished to overhear what they said, to see if it was true what the gossips had told him.

By a strange chance Basil Brent had uttered no word of love in the walk with Norma, until they stopped to look at the rising moon within a few paces of Bob Brent upon the cliff.

And he heard all that was said, the words of love, the request of Basil to Norma, that if he fell in the attack on Brazos the Buccaneer that she should become his, Bob's, wife, and her pledge to do so.

Then he glided away in the moonlight, reached the little church, and, gliding into it through a window which he had before observed was open, he had awaited their coming, and, as they neared the ill-omened grave of the buccaneer who had been hanged and whose monument was a stone gallows, he had crept up into the belfry and softly tolled the bell.

He heard Norma's cry of fear, saw her swoon away, and beheld his brother raise her in his strong arms and bear her swiftly away toward the nearest cottage.

Then he laughed, a mocking, discordant laugh, and hastening out of the little church rapidly made his way down the path to the beach and thus on along it around to the harborage near the village.

In the mean time the young naval officer had borne Norma Sprague toward a cottage not very far away, but she had rallied ere they had reached there, and soon returned to consciousness.

The bell had ceased its dismal tolling, and no longer surrounded by the monuments of the dead, Norma, after a shudder as she glanced about her, said, uneasily:

"I fainted, did I not?"

"Yes, Norma; but you need have no fear now."

"It was the sight of that terrible grave of the old buccaneer, gleaming in the moonlight, and the tolling of the bell that completely unnerved me, for it is said that ill-fortune follows those who see that grave by moonlight."

"It is but an old gossip's story, Norma, and you must not be influenced by superstition."

"But, come, let us walk homeward, for I have much to do ere I leave; but you have made me very happy, my little darling, and I hope no shadows will fall upon our love," and Basil Brent led the maiden on toward Beacon Hill, and after telling her that he would call upon the morrow to see her father and ask him for her and say farewell, he walked rapidly away in the moonlight, while his heart was not as light as he could wish, as the tolling of the bell had affected him in spite of his utter disregard of superstition, and how to account for it he was at a loss.

Norma watched his departure, until he faded from view in the distance, and then she began to pace to and fro in deep meditation.

She recalled what had passed, and in her heart she felt sorry for Bob Brent, whom she knew loved her devotedly.

But he had never told her of that love, never asked her to be his wife.

Had he done so she would have accepted him, believing she loved him, and yet, though seeing Basil afterward she would have remained true

to her first love, though the latter one was stronger.

She dearly loved Bob, and admired his reckless nature, while she was the more drawn toward him on account of his brave act in saving her from being burned to death.

By all the laws of love and romance he was the one she should have loved and married; but Basil Brent had come between, and so it was that she knew at last her heart's affection was all centered upon him.

Suddenly she stopped in her walk, for she saw a form advancing up the gravel path toward the mansion.

Had Basil returned? was her first thought.

But she saw not the glitter of brass buttons and gold lace and recognized Bob Brent.

He came toward her slowly, and taking her hand said quietly:

"Norma, I sail to-morrow, as you know, on a secret expedition which my brother leads, so I have come to say good-by."

"Why, Bob, you seem really blue, not at all like yourself, I assure you."

"Has anything gone wrong?" she asked, struck by his serious manner, so thoroughly unlike his usual bright disposition.

"Nothing has gone wrong, Norma; but I have come to ask you for your love, to tell you that you have been my idol since the night I took you from this house when it was in flames."

"As time has passed I have loved you more, and when at sea you have been ever near me, it has seemed, in spirit, to protect me."

"I am going away now, and it may be that I will never return, for our mission is one of desperate danger; but ere I go I wish to let you know how dear you are to me, how far more than friendship it is that I feel for you and to ask you to be my wife some day."

He had taken her hand as he spoke, and his words were uttered earnestly and with an emotion he could not conceal.

He wished to see if he could win her, ignoring the fact that she was pledged to his brother, and so he cast all upon a die.

"If I fail, so let it be."

"If she turns to one whom she has loved for years, whom she knows loves her, rather than to Basil, a friend of a few weeks, all will be well."

"I will take the chance, and the result be with them."

So he had argued, and he poured his whole soul into his confession of love to her.

She was deeply affected, and raising her hands to his broad shoulders, looked squarely up into his handsome, reckless face.

"Bob, dear Bob, I do love you, but it is as I would love a brother; for what I feel toward you is not the affection that I would give to one whom I could marry."

"I owe you my life, I owe you years of happiness, for ever have you been most kind and good to me."

"Be my brother, Bob, but do not ask for other love than that which I would give to you as a sister."

He did not speak, but his face showed how deeply he was moved.

Then he turned and walked away.

Not a word did he utter, and when she called to him he made no reply.

He had gone, knowing that he could not win her back, while his heart was full of bitterness as he hissed through his set teeth as he strode on in the moonlight:

"I gave her the chance."

"He has won her from me, and upon their heads be what follows, for she has cast me adrift!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SMUGGLERS.

SOME time previous to the opening of this story with the love scene on the beach a vessel was sailing swiftly along over the seas, and heading for the port of Boston, some ten leagues distant.

It was night, and the sea was smooth, the wind light; but the pretty craft was making six knots out of a four-knot breeze.

From hull to truck she was a graceful craft, and the spread of her canvas was immense, while she hardly seemed to bend under its pressure, though she had all sails drawing.

Besides her two side-lights she carried a blue lantern in the fore-top, seemingly as a signal, and all of her crew of twenty men were scanning the seas as though in search of a sail.

"Sail ho!"

The cry came from the lookout forward, and soon like a specter in the darkness a small craft was seen ahead, running directly toward the ingoing vessel.

Seizing a blue lantern Bob Brent, for he was captain of the craft, swung it once around his head, and from the stranger came an answering signal.

Then the Golden Hope was brought to, and soon after the stranger came slowly toward her, shortening sail as he did so.

The craft that had been discerned was a small sloop, with a narrow, long hull and mast that towered far above her decks.

A person beholding her would have at once been struck with the remarkable height of her mast, and length of her boom and bowsprit, which, enabled her to spread a vast quantity of canvas.

Gliding slowly alongside of the Golden Hope, a man in sailor garb sprung on board from the strange craft, and was met by Bob Brent, who at once led him into the cabin.

As they seated themselves at the table, upon which Bob Brent placed a decanter and glasses, the light falling upon the face of the visitor revealed Captain Conrad, the one who had successfully won at cards the fortune of the Golden Hope's captain.

Since the two had met that night in the gambling *salon* in Boston, they had frequently crossed each other's paths and generally upon the high seas.

"Well, Captain Brent, have you a good cargo on hand this voyage?" asked Conrad quietly, as he poured out a glass of brandy and dashed it off.

"Yes, a valuable one, for there are Spanish wines, French laces and silks, with a quantity of other freight of a costly character."

"Here is a list of what I have, and its value," and he handed over to Captain Conrad several papers.

The latter glanced at them closely and then said:

"Yes, there is considerable money in this freight, and, from its value your share will be just three thousand dollars, which I will now pay you," and he handed over to the master of the Golden Hope a roll of crisp bank-notes.

Bob Brent took them and slowly counted them over, with the air of a man who loved gold to such a degree that he made it his idol.

"Yes, this is right; but I think, Captain Conrad, I should have a larger percentage."

"I cannot afford to pay it to you," was the reply.

"I take big risks, in bringing smuggled goods here, and delivering them to you, Captain Conrad, and fear detection all the time, so I must have larger pay to compensate."

"Your risks are very light, sir, for you receive the goods at sea, from my agents in the West Indies, and you deliver them to me here ten leagues off-shore, by night, and then sail on into the harbor with clean papers."

"Your crew will not betray you, as long as you pay them well and promptly, and you certainly get big money for the trouble and danger you are put to."

"No, Captain Brent, I am the one who must take the risk, for my coaster has to make port and get rid of the goods under the very eyes of the law-hounds."

"Still I want more money."

"You are grasping, Brent, and I will not pay it."

"Why, the cargo you have to-night is worth thirty thousand dollars."

"True, and take from it the sum I pay you, the expense of my vessel and crew in cruising off here to head your vessel off, and the percentage to the Jews who dispose of the things, and you will find I get only about double what you do, while I risk everything."

"In fact my risk is so great for a small sum, I am half-inclined to return to piratical cruising again."

"Again? Then you were once a pirate?"

"Did I say again?"

"You certainly did."

"Well, I meant to say I would turn pirate, for the risks are little more and the receipts ten times what I make by smuggling."

"What do you say, Brent, to turning the Golden Hope into a buccaneer craft, with me for commander and you as first officer sharing equally with me in prize-money?"

"Do you think I would become a pirate simply because I have been willing to make a little money by smuggling?" indignantly said Bob Brent.

"I didn't know; but should you wish to do so don't forget my proposition, while, if I should hoist the black flag over some good craft meanwhile, I will meet you on your voyages as now, and give you my booty to run in and dispose of, for then, as there will be no purchase-money as now, our profits will be much larger."

"I could still depend on you, Brent, as now, were I to turn pirate, could I not?"

"I am not a man to betray one who has befriended me, even in the manner that you have done."

"Well said; but I have befriended you, have I not?"

"Let me see, two years ago you were mate of a vessel not your own, and now you possess this craft."

"Then too you owed me all you possessed upon your notes, and I gave those back to you, while I have paid you some sixty thousand dollars in cash."

"Not a bad two years' work, is it, Captain Brent?"

Bob Brent made no reply, but sat biting his lips as though in ill humor.

At last he cried:

"I have made money, I admit, five times as much through you, as by my honest trading;

but I have need for more money, as I wish to give up the sea soon, and I demand larger pay."

Captain Conrad was silent for a few moments, and then he said thoughtfully:

"Brent, I will agree to it upon condition that you undertake to dispose of for me piratical booty instead of the smuggled goods which I have been purchasing in the West Indies through my agents and having you bring to the States for me."

"I too need more money, and I want excitement, for this running out to meet you on your voyages, is not sufficient for me in the way of risks."

"I love danger, and I like to hear the roar of guns, shouts of combatants and clash of steel, so I will take to piracy, and we will have a rendezvous where you can receive my booty, and run it into port for me, and you shall have one-fourth of the profits, the other going to myself and crew, and if I am successful in capturing prizes, you should make the fortune you long for within the year."

"What do you say?"

"I will not run in pirate booty for you, Captain Conrad."

"As you please; I can find plenty who will, so consider our engagement at an end," was the indifferent reply.

"No, I will yield, for I need the money," was the reply of Bob Brent.

"You are wise; but, I guess the freight is about transferred to my craft now, so we will part; but meet me in Boston at the usual haunt, and I will have gotten my plans into shape, so as to let you know all about them."

"Good-night," and dashing off another drink of brandy, Captain Conrad left the cabin, followed by Bob Brent.

While they had been in the cabin the crews of the Golden Hope and sloop were busy transferring certain smuggled goods from the former to the latter, and this work being finished, the two vessels moved apart, the pretty craft of Bob Brent holding on its way to Boston, to discharge the legitimate cargo it had on board, and with no suspicion falling upon its skipper as a smuggler.

CHAPTER IX.

UNDER A SABLE FLAG.

CAPTAIN CARLOS CONRAD, as he called himself, was a strange man.

Certainly he was a most mysterious one, for he was known apparently to no one, other than as a man of wealth, who seemed to enjoy life to its fullest extent.

He lived in rooms on a fashionable street in Boston, frequented the aristocratic assembly-rooms, and attracted considerable attention from his *distingue* air.

He was courteous to all, but familiar with no one, and those gentlemen who had met him socially liked him, yet seemed to feel a little dread of him.

He said that he was a Frenchman, born in New Orleans, and hinted that he was a large sugar planter there, but, on account of the climate not agreeing with him, preferred to live in a Northern climate.

He was fond of sailing, and was wont often to go on a short cruise down to Portland or to New York, for the benefit of his health.

To look at him one would never suppose that Captain Carlos Conrad ever had had a sick day; but then he said that he knew that he had disease of the heart, and was a great sufferer therefrom.

He was a most successful gambler, as many had reason to know who tested his luck at cards, and yet he was generous to a wonderful degree to all with whom he came in contact.

Some days after the meeting between Captain Conrad and Bob Brent, on board the Golden Hope, the two met, as if by accident, in an aristocratic *salon* in Boston.

"Glad to see you back again, Captain Brent."

"Had a pleasant voyage, I hope," said Captain Conrad, pleasantly.

Bob Brent, who was a great favorite in Boston circles, thanked the captain for his good wishes and then they went off together for a game of cards, they said, to the rooms of the smuggler chief.

These rooms were a perfect retreat of luxury, for they were gorgeously furnished, and a slave in livery presided over them to look out for his master's comfort.

"I am not in, Jet, to any one who may call," said Captain Conrad, addressing the negro, whose name fitted him well, for he was certainly as black as jet.

"Yes, massa, I understands, sah."

"Bring liquors and refreshments," continued the captain, and he led the way to his delightful little sitting-room.

Soon the two were seated in easy-chairs, with refreshments and liquors on the table near them, and Captain Conrad lay back sending rings of smoke from his cigar into the air, while he watched them float away with apparent interest.

"Brent?" he said at last.

"Yes."

"You have heard that there is a small cruiser

being built here for the Cartagenian Government, and that she is to be turned over to the officers and crew, who are to come after her in perfect condition, armed and equipped?"

"Yes, I have heard of the craft, and her commander and crew are expected to arrive soon."

"You are to go after them to Cartagena, Brent."

"I?"

"Yes, for your vessel is to be chartered for the voyage, and you will receive good pay for it."

"To-morrow our envoy from the Cartagenian Government will call upon you, give you a cargo out and have you return with the officers and crew for the new cruiser."

"You will be well paid, for I might as well tell you, Brent, that the schooner is being built for me, as I secretly hold a commission in the service of Cartagena."

"I shall give out here that I am going to my plantation in the South, and about the time you are expected back I shall set sail in my sloop."

"As usual I will meet you, transfer the cargo you have for me, and pay you your commission."

"Then you will bring the crew for the schooner into port and you shall be paid liberally for your services."

"And you are to enter the service of Cartagena as a commodore of a cruiser?" asked Bob Brent in surprise.

"Oh dear no, but I shall sail out of this port as such, and thus get to sea in perfect shape."

"And then?"

"Why I will raise the pirate colors over my deck and go cruising for game."

"Hal turn pirate?"

"Of course, for did I not tell you that I would?"

"I remember now."

"Once, my dear Brent, I was a rich man; but I lost my riches in a way that made me revengeful, and I came here a poor man, almost."

"But I bought goods in the West Indies, with the few dollars I won in gambling, and you know we met and I got you to bring them in for me."

"All the while I was building this schooner in secret, or rather for secret use, and she is now near completion, so I wish you to bring my officers and crew, for they will be ready to come, as I will give you a letter that will secure them."

"Once the schooner is at sea I will raise the flag of the free rover and the booty I get you will dispose of for me."

"I will not break my word, Captain Conrad; but you are a remarkable man."

"Ah, yes, I have been so called before," was the quiet reply of the smuggler.

"When do you wish me to sail?"

"As soon as you can get your cargo on board and depart."

"And I am to return at once?"

"As quickly as you can, for I am anxious to be off."

"Well, I will be ready soon, and yet you know I am to be innocent of what you may do after you get to sea in your vessel."

"Certainly, for I will simply let it be reported that the commander of the schooner turned her into a pirate, and I will not be known in the matter myself, for I shall have gone South, you know, to return to my plantation," and Captain Conrad smiled significantly.

"I understand; but what is to be my pay for all this?"

"I will pay you liberally, never fear, and keep my contract as to your fourth interest in all piratical booty you dispose of for me."

"Now let us arrange signals, rendezvous and all else necessary for our meeting when I have run up the black flag."

For a long time the two sat planning together, and then Bob Brent took his departure.

But the next day an agent, purporting to be from the Cartagenian Government came to him and chartered the Golden Hope to go after the crew for the new cruiser which was being built and armed in Boston.

The Golden Hope set sail on her mission, returned in good time with several dark-faced, black-eyed officers and a crew of as thorough a set of cut-throats as ever were congregated together, and ten days after their coming the pretended cruiser put out to sea, winning the admiration of all who saw her.

Within less than a week after a vessel came into port and reported having been captured and robbed by an armed schooner, which some of the crew had reported as being the Cartagenian cruiser, whose commander had boldly turned into a buccaneer craft, and the tidings ran like wildfire through the town, and those who had entertained the pretended gallant Cartagenian officers hung their heads in shame.

CHAPTER X.

CHANGING COLORS.

CAPTAIN CONRAD was a sailor, every inch of him, and this his crew found out before Boston Light had been dropped a league astern.

The schooner, which had been built presumably for the service of the struggling people of Cartagena, was a fine one in every particular.

She had been designed for stanchness at sea in rough weather, and speed in all weathers.

Her bulwarks were very high, massive, and a fair protection against all ordinary shot.

Her hull lay low in the water, rising in bow and stern, and she carried a broadside of four guns, with a pivot mounted fore and aft, and of large caliber.

Her spars were light and capable of easy handling, and both masts and top-masts were very high, while her main boom, and even gaff, went far out over the taffrail, and her bowsprit pushed its sharp point away ahead of the razor-like bows.

Every one who saw the beautiful craft was delighted with her, and the young Cartagena Captain, who was known as Senor Moralez, was kept busy entertaining visitors up to the moment of sailing.

Bob Brent, who had brought the officers and crew on to take charge of the vessel, was down to see her set sail, and he told the Senor Moralez as he was to depart with a cargo for Southern ports, he would follow him out to sea and thus a good idea of the speed of the schooner could be gained by a test with the Golden Hope, which was known to be the swiftest craft that entered the port of Boston.

It was near sunset when the schooner set sail, and many a farewell and *bon voyage* was wafted after her by those who little dreamed of the cheat practiced upon them by the daring smuggler, Conrad, who had decided to try his hand at piracy.

As she sped down the harbor the Golden Hope was seen getting under weigh, and soon after she came dashing along in the schooner's wake.

All on board the new craft were delighted at her speed, for she seemed fairly to fly by the islands.

She was carrying a fair quantity of canvas, in spite of a threatening storm, and the city was fading from sight astern when suddenly out of the cabin came the man who was to rule the destinies of the craft.

It was Captain Conrad, and he was dressed in a very picturesque uniform, but one which was not known as belonging to any nation's service.

"She is a fine vessel, Senor Moralez," said Captain Conrad.

Senor Moralez started.

He had not heard the approach of his chief, though he was well aware that he had been in hiding on the schooner since the night before.

"Yes, senor, and I congratulate you," he said with a bow to Captain Conrad, who smiled and returned dryly:

"Thank you; but, Senor Moralez, yonder comes the brig Golden Hope, is it not?"

"Yes, sir, for Captain Brent said he was bound South on a voyage and would race us out of port."

"And how does his vessel go as to speed compared with the schooner?"

"She is gaining, senor."

"Ah! can the schooner be less fast than I thought?"

"No, sir, for she is matched against a craft that I believe has no equal."

"Crowd on canvas, then, Moralez."

"But the storm, Senor Captain," and Moralez pointed to the dark clouds gathering.

"The men must stand ready to take in sail at an instant's notice, so crowd on the canvas."

It was done, though the men shook their heads in dread.

But the Golden Hope also ran up extra sail and came along in the same fleet manner as before.

Both vessels swept out of the port in the darkness, right into the teeth of the coming storm.

But as they sped on, the Golden Hope ran up to the schooner and passed her to windward.

"I never saw a craft hold me as your schooner has, captain," called out Bob Brent, as he sailed by.

"I am glad to know that much; but your vessel is a wonder, was the reply."

And as the canvas was taken in with a rush on board of both vessels, they dashed into the very jaws of the tempest and were lost to sight of each other in a moment more.

"Remember the rendezvous on your return," Bob Brent heard, in the clear voice of Captain Conrad, and then was wafted back again:

"Ay, ay, sir, I will be on hand!"

Then the officers and crew of the schooner had all that they could do to look after their vessel, for the tempest was a severe one.

But the new craft proved herself all that could be wished of her, and without the loss of a sail or a spar rode out the gale.

The next morning the storm had blown away, and the schooner was cruising along under easy canvas, when Captain Conrad came on deck.

"Senor Moralez," he said, quietly.

"Ay, ay, Senor Captain!"

"Call the men to quarters and let them see the flag that they are to sail under."

The order was obeyed promptly.

It was a critical moment, for the crew had been shipped by Moralez in South American and West Indian ports, presumably to serve upon a Cartagenian cruiser.

That they suspected another flag than an

honest one would be hoisted was doubtless the case, but they had not been told so.

Did they refuse now to serve as free rovers, to sail under the colors which Captain Conrad chose to run up over his vessel, it would be bad for the commander and his officers.

The men knew that they had a splendid craft, fully armed and equipped, and they had so far been able to see that their commander was a thorough seaman and had the look of one who would stand no trifling and be master of his own vessel.

The crew was called to quarters, and then Captain Conrad handed to his first officer a roll of bunting and said, in a voice that was heard by every man on the schooner:

"Officer Moralez, run that flag up to the peak and let my crew see the colors they are to cruise under."

Then turning to the crew he continued:

"Men, I have a fancy to cruise where I please, obeying only my own dictates.

"The result will be most liberal to us all, though in winning gold hard knocks must be expected.

"If there is any coward on board this craft, who fears to sail under a flag of my liking, let him make himself known."

There was a dead silence of fully a minute, a silence that became almost painful; then Captain Conrad resumed:

"Men, in me you see one who has been known upon the seas in the past as Brazos the Buccaneer, and I now christen this schooner as the Red Sea-Raider, and will show you my flag.

"Throw the colors to the breeze, Officer Moralez."

In answer to the command a roll of blood-red bunting went up to the peak, and upon being shaken out was seen to be a field of crimson in the center of which was a white skull and crossbones.

A cheer broke from the crew, and the pretended Cartagenaian cruiser had changed her colors.

Two months after the Red Raider met at sea, off Boston, the Golden Hope and Bob Brent carried secretly into port a rich cargo of booty, in which he held a fourth interest, thus changing from smuggling goods to disposing of loot gained by bloodshed and crime under the red flag of Brazos the Buccaneer.

CHAPTER XI. THE TWO CAPTAINS.

TIME passed on, and the schooner Red Sea-Raider and her captain were becoming well known and dreaded upon the seas.

The schooner, it was said, was painted red, her spars were also of the same carmine hue, while her rails were white as snow.

Her crimson flag, with its hideous emblem, was becoming known from Nova Scotia to the Caribbean Sea, and few vessels were speedy enough to escape the fleet schooner, once she started in chase.

Brazos the Buccaneer, as Captain Conrad was pleased to call himself, avoided crimes, and was anxious to take prizes without bloodshed.

If a vessel resisted him the crew suffered for it, but otherwise no life was taken, though the craft was stripped of all its booty.

If there had been a determined resistance, the punishment, when taken, was to burn the vessel and set the crew adrift to reach shore as best they could.

If no resistance was offered, the vessel would not be burned, but Brazos would permit it to go on its way, after simply robbing it of all valuables.

Of course there were many stories that made Brazos out as the worst of monsters, and his name was dreaded by all who were unable to protect their vessels, while he was continually chased by the war-craft of Spain, England, and the United States.

So matters stood, when suddenly there reappeared in Boston the well-known form and face of Captain Conrad.

He had come North once more for his health, he said to those who greeted him, and that he had prospered seemed evident from the lavish manner in which he spent his gold.

He secured luxurious quarters for the time being, and was welcomed as before by the lovers of riches.

He looked well, for an invalid, and his face was burned to a bronze hue, he said by his voyage on the sea.

Some days after the coming of Captain Conrad, Bob Brent arrived in port, and the two met at the gambling *salon* where they had first become acquainted over a game of cards.

After a bottle of wine and a friendly game together, Captain Conrad departed, and soon after Bob Brent followed him.

The steps of the latter led him to a handsome house on Milk street, and upon knocking he was admitted by a negro servant in livery.

It was Jet, and he told Bob Brent that his master, Captain Conrad, awaited him.

The merchant captain was ushered into the charming room where the pirate captain sat taking his comfort, and was pleasantly greeted.

There were decanters, glasses and fruit on the table, with a box of fragrant cigars, and the visitor was told to help himself.

"You take big chances, Captain Conrad, in coming here," said Bob Brent, throwing himself into a chair and lighting a cigar.

"I told you when we met off-shore that I would see you soon, and here I am; but the chances are not great, for you alone know Captain Conrad, the Louisiana planter, in his other character of Brazos, the Buccaneer, of the schooner Red Sea-Raider."

And the speaker smiled complacently, as though he was referring to his virtues in a modest way.

"Your crew know you."

"None of my crew are here."

"Where is your vessel?"

"In hiding on the coast of Maine, where she is undergoing repairs, for after leaving you I fell in with a cruiser."

"I heard firing."

"Yes; I did not wish the cruiser to follow you into port, and perhaps suspect something by your not being robbed, for we were doubtless seen by the vessel-of-war together, though we did not sight him as he lay without sail up, and so I fought him."

"With what result?"

"Oh, I gave him as good as he did me, ran away from him to lead him a long way off, and while he went into Portland for repairs I sought a hiding-place on the coast of Maine, for I have to put in a new foremast and bowsprit, while my hull needs patching badly."

"You do not think the cruiser recognized my vessel?"

"There is but one craft like yours, so it would be well for you to at once go and report to the authorities that you were overhauled by the Red Sea-Raider, who robbed you of a part of your cargo and also forced you to pay a snug sum in gold to save the balance."

"By reporting this before the commander of the cruiser makes known that he saw you alongside of the pirate, you will at once disarm suspicion."

"I will do so at once."

"Fortunately the commandant is away, but returns to-morrow, and that will give you an excuse for not sooner making your report, while you can say you wished to keep it quiet for fear of injuring the reputation of your vessel as a flyer, when it is thought, you know, nothing can overhaul her."

"And truthfully."

"Yes, but we will speak of her after awhile, for I have something to say to you about her."

"Now about the sales?"

"They turned out well, as Rothschild told me to-day."

"Well, it was a very rich cargo, this last one."

"But how much is my share?"

"Rothschild told me to come in to-morrow and get the money, which he said would be about forty thousand in all."

"Good! well, get the money and come to-morrow night and pay me my share, as I wish to make a number of purchases to send to the schooner where she is hiding."

"How will you send them?"

"Oh, I shall charter a coaster and run there in her."

"And the crew will recognize you some time."

"No, for six of my own crew are here to take charge of her."

"You can trust them?"

"I am no fool to put my head in the lion's mouth without first drawing his teeth; but you must be getting rich fast, Captain Brent?"

"I am doing very well."

"Had you not become my partner you would still have been a poor man."

"Perhaps, and had with it the feeling of having lived an honest life."

"Bah! don't preach, for gold is the salve to heal a burnt conscience."

"But, as you owe much to me, I wish to have you prove your appreciation."

"As how?"

"I wish to purchase your vessel."

"The Golden Hope?"

"Yes."

"I will not sell her."

"She is faster than my schooner, fleet as the Sea-Raider is, and I need a craft which no cruiser can catch."

"Your brig is just what I want, and I'll pay you a handsome sum for her."

"She is not for sale."

"To me, yes."

"No, not to you, Captain Conrad."

The buccaneer smiled, and it was a smile that Bob Brent did not like.

"I need her, and I must have her, Brent, so name your price."

"I will not sell her for four times her value."

"The craft is a marvelous one, possessing phenomenal speed and seaworthy qualities, and I will not dispose of her."

"What did she cost you?"

"Fifteen thousand dollars."

"I will double the sum and play you for her, best two in three games of cards."

"No, it will not tempt me," said Bob Brent, but his face showed that he was tempted.

He was a natural gambler, and, as such, had faith in his powers of commanding luck.

"We will call it forty thousand against the Golden Hope, best three in five games," quietly said the buccaneer.

"I will do it," was the quick response, and the face of Bob Brent flushed with excitement.

CHAPTER XII. LOST AND WON.

BOB BRENT had full confidence in himself.

He was, as I have said, a lover of gold, and he laid it by to add to his fortune.

He had gambled himself into a difficulty, which he had turned smuggler to extricate himself from.

With a well-paid crew, and not one from his native home, he had run little risk of discovery, and so he had added steadily to his fortune by the sale of smuggled goods until he felt that he was growing rich.

Then came the next step of crime, when he began to dispose of the piratical booty which Brazos the Buccaneer brought to him, and yet he tried to fight against the idea that he was as guilty as the plunderer.

He had gotten into the swim of crime, and he was making a fortune by it.

He was honored by all who knew him, no one suspected him of doing an act that was wrong, while he was admired as a dashing, gallant seaman.

Women sought to know him, women in whose veins was the blue blood of old Massachusetts, and all knew that his dandy-like style of always wearing kid gloves was to hide scars received in doing a daring and noble act.

That he was a sailor exquisite, no one thought of who knew the magnificent pluck of the man.

So stood Bob Brent, sea-captain, when his brother Basil returned, an officer in the United States Navy.

The going up to Boston the day after Basil's arrival by Bob Brent, was to see his colleague in crime, Captain Conrad, who had told him to meet him in the town.

He had done so, and the result the reader has seen, the visit ending in the compact to gamble for the possession of the Golden Hope, which Captain Conrad knew could drop his schooner, fleet as it was, out of sight in a day's run.

The Golden Hope was undergoing needed repairs, and so Bob Brent had remained in the city, awaiting the coming of Conrad.

"You agree to the games then, Brent, for the Golden Hope against forty thousand dollars?" said Conrad.

"I have said so."

"Well, I will call Jet to bring us cards and we will begin at once."

Jet soon had the cards before them, and his master said quietly:

"Remain and witness the playing, Jet, if you wish."

"Thank you, massa, I wishes ter do so," was the reply.

It may have been accident, it so seemed, for Jet to take a stand where he could see the hand of Bob Brent.

As he thus stood the merchant captain could not see the negro, while Captain Conrad could do so distinctly.

An "I. O. U. forty thousand dollars" was written by Captain Conrad and placed upon the table as a stake, while Bob Brent wrote on a slip a full sale of the brig Golden Hope and put it down by the paper of the buccaneer.

Forty thousand was a tempting sum and Bob Brent felt sure that he must win three of five games.

If he had thought to the contrary he would not have touched the cards.

The game was begun, each man playing with remarkable deliberation.

The first game was won by the buccaneer.

Bob Brent gave a sigh and played more carefully the next.

He was rewarded for his caution by winning the game.

The third game left Bob Brent a winner, and his eyes flashed with delight.

The buccaneer was perfectly calm, while Jet looked on with deepest interest.

The fourth game was won by the buccaneer. Then the excitement of Bob Brent was intense.

The next game must decide.

He was pale, and he dashed off a drink of brandy to steady his nerves.

A few more turns of the cards and he would either be forty thousand dollars richer, or he would have lost his loved vessel, the Golden Hope.

He arose and took several turns across the room.

The buccaneer calmly smoked his cigar and dallied with the cards.

If he felt any emotion he did not reveal the fact.

But then he was an old hand at gambling, and crime as well, while a few more lives taken, a few more vessels captured, would make up his lost gold, if Bob Brent won.

Jet seemed a trifle nervous too, for he showed his white teeth, and his eyes rolled in their sockets uneasily.

"I am ready," and with an effort at self-con-

trol, Bob Brent again resumed his seat at the table.

He put a cigar into his mouth, and without lighting it, chewed almost viciously upon it.

Then the deciding game was begun, and the two men played slowly to the end, the one anxious, nervous, the other seemingly indifferent and as cool as an icicle.

"I have won, Brent," said the buccaneer chief calmly, as he drew toward him the bill of sale of the Golden Hope.

"Curses, yes, my beautiful craft is gone," said Bob Brent, almost savagely.

"You had better have sold her to me in the first place, Brent, and been that much in pocket; but I am glad to get her, and I will name her the Red Sea-Raider."

"When do you want her?" growled Bob Brent, for he was very moody at his bad luck.

"Meet me at sea, three weeks from to-night, and I will pretend to capture your vessel after a long chase to the Bahamas, and will send you and your crew ashore in the schooner's boats, and you can so make your report."

"And for the future?"

"Oh, order another craft, a duplicate of the brig, and I'll give you more piratical booty to run in and sell than ever before; but in the mean time you can charter a vessel for a voyage or two until your new one is finished."

"I can do nothing else," was the sullen reply.

"Now tell me, Brent, do you know a man by the name of Captain Rufus Sprague, a retired sea-captain, who dwells hereabout?"

Bob Brent started, for what had the buccaneer to do with old Captain Sprague, he wondered.

But he answered quickly:

"Yes, I know Captain Sprague, if it is Rufus Sprague, and he has one leg."

"It is the same man, and he has a wife and daughter?"

"His wife is dead," was the moody reply, for Bob Brent liked not the current into which the conversation was drifting.

"And the daughter?"

"Lives with her father at his home."

"And that home?"

"Is somewhere on the coast."

"He is an old acquaintance of mine, one to whom I owe a lasting grudge, and his wife I knew well."

"Is the daughter beautiful?"

"I believe so."

"She should be, for her father was a handsome man, and her mother a most beautiful woman."

"She is but a child."

"Yes, a child of eighteen years, I guess."

"I must look old Sprague up and meet his fair daughter, or perhaps you can tell me just how to find him."

"He lives at the village of G—and his home is Beacon Hill."

"Thank you," dryly said the buccaneer, and soon after Bob Brent took his leave.

He had lost the money put against his beautiful vessel, he had lost the brig, and what was more the buccaneer meant to visit Commodore Sprague and thus meet Norma.

"It shall not be," he said savagely as he walked back to his hotel, and he meant all that he said.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SAILOR SPY.

BOB BRENT was in no enviable mood, as he sat in his room at the tavern, the day following his visit to Brazos the Buccaneer, in his guise of Captain Conrad, the Southern planter.

He had gambled away his beautiful vessel, and he felt that he was wholly in the power of the pirate, and must act as he directed.

"If I was only a little richer I would quit this dangerous life, for, though no one suspects me it is a life of fearful peril."

"I am no pirate, I have never stained my hands with human blood, but I grow rich on booty that costs the lives of my fellow-beings."

"I would that I could break with this man, Conrad or Brazos, or whoever the mysterious fellow may be, and I will, if he attempts to play any game upon Commodore Sprague and Norma."

"Well, what do you want?" he asked, gruffly, as a servant appeared at the door and broke in upon his meditations.

"A man to see you, sir."

"Who is he?"

"A sailor."

"Show him up," and supposing it was one of the seamen of the Golden Hope he gave him no further thought.

Soon a man entered, and he was in sailor garb, while his face revealed his foreign birth.

He was a Spaniard, but spoke English well and saluted Bob Brent politely as he entered the room.

The young sea-captain saw that he was not one of his men, and yet his face seemed familiar.

"Well, my man, who are you and what do you want with Bob Brent?" he asked, in his free-and-easy manner.

"Captain, don't you remember to have seen me before?"

"Yes, but I do not know where."

The man drew a step nearer and looked about him, as though fearing to be overheard, while he said:

"I am one of the Red Sea-Raider's crew, sir."

"Ah! I recall you now; but what are you doing here?" and Bob Brent felt a little uneasy.

"I came here, sir, with the captain."

"With Brazos?"

"Yes, sir."

"He is here now."

"Yes, sir, and intends to take back a coaster with needed supplies, ammunition and what is wanted to put the schooner in perfect trim."

"I know that."

"You saw him last night, sir."

"How do you know?"

"I saw you go to his quarters."

"Where were you?"

"Spying around, sir, for we who are with him here, are allowed to go about at will until needed."

"Well, did he send you to me?"

"Ah, no, sir, I came on my own account."

Bob Brent felt uneasy.

He had an idea that the man meant to force money from him, so he said:

"Well, out with what you want?"

"I wish to serve you, senor, and through you myself."

"In what way?"

"You lost in your game of cards last night to the captain?"

"Ha! how do you know this?"

"I have been spying around, sir, for a purpose of my own, and I was in hiding in the captain's quarters last night and heard all."

"Ah! and he knows this?"

"Oh no, senor, he did not know it, nor did he suspect that I had what he said to Jet."

"Well?" and Bob Brent grew more and more uneasy.

"He does not mean well toward you, senor."

"What do you mean?"

"He is half afraid of you, sir, and besides he wants you out of the way, so he can marry your lady-love."

Bob Brent was upon his feet at this, livid with rage.

Grasping the sailor by the arm he said hoarsely:

"Tell me all that you know of his treachery."

"You know the negro Jet, senor, and the captain are more like mates than master and servant."

"Yes, Brazos rescued him from a slaver, I believe, and the negro has often saved his life."

"Yes, sir, and is a smart one too, and brave as a lion."

"There's no man on the Raider that dare grip with him."

"But to your story."

"Yes, senor, the captain was telling Jet that he meant to run your vessel down toward the Indies, board her, quarrel with you and kill you, take your craft for his own, along with your crew and then keep up his piracies until he got all the treasure he wanted, when he would make your lady-love his wife."

"So he said this, did he?" asked Bob Brent through his shut teeth.

"Yes, sir."

"You overheard it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you say that you were?"

"Do you remember a window upon your left, sir, as you sat in the room with him?"

"Yes, it had a heavy curtain hanging over it."

"Yes, sir; but it opens into a narrow space between two walls, and is never opened except for air."

"I lowered myself down from the roof and was standing outside, having taken out a pane of glass."

"Why were you there?"

"To kill Captain Brazos," was the hoarse reply.

"Ha! you confess this?"

"Yes, senor, for I am revengeful, and I have long sought him to end his life, for I have reason for so doing."

"I helped him move to his quarters there, and so found out all about them, and I went there last night to assassinate him, for I could ascend the rope to the roof, and from thence reach the garden by a large tree whose branches overhang a wing of the house."

"And why do you seek his life?"

"That is my own affair, Senor Captain; but after hearing what passed between you I decided to let you avenge me, yes, and yourself too, so I came to you."

"You are a strange man," said Bob Brent.

"We are all not what we seem, senor; but do you wish me to tell you how you can avenge me, and prevent your vessel from falling into the hands of Brazos?"

"Yes."

"If you are not known in the matter, then he cannot feel revengeful toward you, not knowing how he was betrayed, while in fact I will let him know that I did it all."

"That will be my revenge."

"Tell me what you wish?"

"The schooner lies in hiding on the coast of Maine, in a place where I can pilot you."

"She is beached and undergoing repairs, and can readily be captured by a good force."

"When the captain returns, I will be supposed to be dead, for I have bribed a comrade to say how he saw me shot dead in a broil in a rum-shop, and thrown into the harbor."

"My comrade will think I only wish to desert the schooner."

"Captain Brazos will go back with the balance to the vessel, and you can follow with your force, or send some one else to do so, as it is best you should not be suspected."

"Brazos the Buccaneer will be captured, I hope, as I wish to see him hanged, and if not taken he will be killed, and his schooner will become your prize, and she is a valuable one."

"You can thus get your revenge, for his intended treachery to you, have your share of the prize-money, and get out of your way a dangerous foe, one who means to steal your lady-love from you."

"What do you say, senor?"

After a moment of deep thought, Bob Brent said, firmly:

"I agree to the plan, so make your arrangements, my man, to serve me, and in doing so you can serve yourself."

"But I suppose you wish gold for this?" and the lover of the yellow metal feared that he would have to pay liberally for the services of the sailor spy.

"Oh, no, I will need no gold."

"I have plenty," was the answer, to the great surprise and delight of Bob Brent, who, after a further conversation with the sailor, in which their plan of action was sketched out, was again left to his meditations.

"He would steal Norma from me, kill me and get my beautiful vessel, would he?"

"Well, we shall see the end of his plans."

"I must not be known in this affair, so I will have my brother Basil do the work, and it will come well from him; but I must go along to get some of the honor of the capture of the pirate."

"Now to arrange matters so there will be no mistake," and when Bob Brent at length returned to G—, he felt confident of success.

But he returned to find that his brother Basil had won from him Norma Sprague, and so he decided upon a double plot of revenge, which will soon be revealed.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE EXPEDITION SETS SAIL.

THE reader can now readily understand the situation of affairs as they stood at the time the expedition was ready to sail against Brazos the Buccaneer.

In hiding, as his vessel was, and dismantled from repairs going on upon her, she was in no condition to resist attack, and the pirate chief had not the slightest dread of being discovered where he was.

The Cuban, Rafael Rodriguez, who was a member of his crew, had, as he had said, joined it to seek revenge for some wrong done him in the past by the outlaw chief.

Thus, through his treachery, Bob Brent had been enabled to be doubly treacherous, for he was plotting not only against the pirate chief, but also against his brother.

If he expected to put an end to his rapid accumulation of gold through the death of the buccaneer, he also felt that he would get rid of one who held a dangerous secret against him and had him in his power, while, if his brother was also killed in the attack upon the outlaw craft, Norma would not only be free to be won by him, but Overlook Manor would come to him as a matter of course.

So argued the designing young sailor, and he went on board of the vessel chartered for the attack on the Red Sea-Raider with a feeling of hope that all would come out as he had planned.

Not wishing to give the Cuban, Rafael Rodriguez, a stronger hold upon him, by allowing him to go down to G—, Bob Brent told Basil that he must go in the vessel to a certain point on the coast near Boston, and there land to go and get the pilot who would lead them to the hiding-place of the Red Sea-Raider.

This was done, and after an absence of a day from the vessel, Bob Brent returned, accompanied by the revengeful Cuban.

Brazos, the Buccaneer, had departed a few days before for his vessel, going upon a small craft which he had loaded with supplies for his schooner, and with all that was needed in repairing her as he wished.

The vessel which had been selected to carry the attacking force was not chosen for speed, as it was not expected that there would be any pursuit; nor was she armed with more than two small ship-guns which had been found at the little seaport from whence she sailed.

Her crew of a hundred men, however, were splendid fellows and armed to the teeth, so to speak, and Basil Brent felt very proud of them.

After the return on board of Bob Brent, accompanied by the pilot, as the Cuban was

known, the vessel set sail on her course to the hiding-place of the buccaneer.

Basil Brent was somewhat surprised that his brother Bob seemed anxious to keep out of the attack on the vessel, and asked to be allowed to take charge of the vessel when the boats should move upon the outlawed schooner.

The young lieutenant saw that his brother had some motive in this, but he did not worry himself to try and solve it, and so said:

"If successful, Bob, it will be through your act that we are so; but then you can take command of this vessel, as you wish, and I will command the fighting crew."

And so the matter was settled between them, greatly to the satisfaction of Bob Brent, who did not wish, under any circumstances, to be seen by Brazos, the Buccaneer, well knowing that in revenge he would betray him as his ally in crime.

The pilot had, at the suggestion of Bob Brent, thoroughly disguised himself, so that, if seen by his comrades he would not be recognized by them, and he was anxious to go with the attacking force, as he said:

"To see that man Brazos die."

"Senor Rodriguez," said Bob Brent, as the two stood on deck together one night, the second after leaving Boston.

"Yes, Senor Captain Brent."

"You wish to see Brazos die, you said?"

"Yes, senor."

"And will go with the attacking force in the boats?"

"Yes, senor."

"You risk your life."

"It is worth it."

"You know that Brazos is as slippery as an eel, so you had better not take any chances about his being killed by others, but do the work yourself."

"Yes, senor, I will see to that, for though captured by the party he might escape and not hang."

"True, and are you over particular about killing one against whom you have no hatred?"

"How do you mean, senor?"

"Simply to oblige me, you know."

"I am no assassin, senor."

"Well no, but in battle a stray bullet might do the work from your pistol, and you would do me a great favor and one I would never forget you for."

"Who is the man, senor?"

"I will tell you when you are about to start on the attack."

"Yes, senor," and the Cuban walked away, while Bob Brent paced the deck in thoughtful mood, congratulating himself upon the way matters were going.

At midnight Basil came on deck to relieve him from duty, and he said, in a quiet way:

"Bob, I have been writing a few letters, and jotting down some last wishes in case aught should happen to me in this coming fight, and I wish you to attend to all for me."

"I will do so, Basil."

"I have written out a paper leaving you Overlook, and all else that I may own, to protect you should aught arise to dispute your title to the place, and I wish several of the men to witness the document so that there will be no trouble."

"Don't speak of dying, Basil," and Bob Brent turned away to hide the emotion which the words of his brother almost overwhelmed him with.

"It is best to be prepared, Bob, and somehow I have a presentiment of evil, a feeling that this cruise may not turn out just as I have hoped, and if it does not, then you will understand my wishes and carry them out."

"The truth is, Bob, I am engaged to Norma Sprague."

"I meant to tell you of this before, but have been prevented, as I have hardly seen you."

"But should I fall in this attack on the buccaneer, I do hope that you will marry Norma, for she loves you dearly I know, and I half-believe you love her."

"No indeed, Basil, except as I might a sister," was the quick reply.

"I am glad of this; but you can love her otherwise I hope if I am taken away."

"Now go below, Bob, and turn in, and we'll have the papers returned in the morning, for with this breeze we should reach the pirates' retreat by to-morrow night," and grasping his brother's hand, Basil walked away, while Bob Brent hastened into the cabin glad to escape from a continuance of the severe ordeal through which he had passed, for the words of his brother seemed to enter into his very soul as remorse surged upon him for what he had plotted against one who had never done him a wrong.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ATTACK.

THE hiding-place of the Red Sea-Raider was certainly a secure one.

On former occasions, Brazos the Buccaneer had gone to the same retreat, and knew it well, an inlet on the Maine coast, where there was a white beach of sand, upon which he could ground his vessel and repair her hull at low tide, and with only the wildest surroundings for

miles, where no human being dwelt, or would care to go except for just such a secret reason as the outlaw chief had in going there.

On this run out from the place in the yawl under sail, which Captain Brazos, and the men who had accompanied him to Boston had gone in, Rafael Rodriguez had taken his bearings well, so that he could return, and he felt no doubt as to being able to pilot the boats into the inlet, while the vessel lay inside, for that he would not undertake to carry in.

The vessel with the attacking force came in sight of the large pines, which grew upon the cliffs overhanging the inlet, just at nightfall, and after keeping half a league off-shore, the anchor was dropped at a point not over a league from the buccaneer craft, so Rafael Rodriguez said.

The boats were at once lowered, the oars muffled, and the men took their places in them in perfect silence.

In the gig, which was to go in advance, Basil Brent was to go with Rafael Rodriguez as pilot, and with them, besides the oarsmen, half a dozen others.

As Rodriguez was going over the side into the boat, Bob Brent stepped up to his side and whispered:

"Remember, do not let Brazos live in hopes of seeing him hanged, but kill him yourself."

"That is what I go for, senor, but the other?"

"Is my brother."

The pilot started slightly but said:

"You know best, senor; but I will keep my word to you."

"Do so," was the reply and Bob Brent turned away as though to avoid his brother who was approaching him.

"Ho, Bob, good-by, and if we don't meet with success run in as near as you dare to pick up our retreating boats, while if we capture the schooner I shall send you word at once."

"Good-by, and I assure you that I am glad you remain on board the ship."

So they parted, Bob Brent not daring to trust himself to say a word of farewell.

A moment after Basil Brent had gone over the side into the gig, which at once moved away followed by the six larger boats, while the vessel, with Bob Brent and eight men on board lay at anchor to await the result.

Having taken his bearings Rafael Rodriguez led the fleet of boats over the dark waters toward the darker shores.

Relieved against the skies he saw the group of pines upon the cliff overhanging the inlet, and he slowly advanced toward the coast.

Nearer and nearer, here and there rounding a small island, or large rock, until the inlet opened before them.

The entrance was not very wide, and yet wide enough for the gig to lead and the other boats to follow three abreast.

They made no sound and only the wash of the waves upon the shore broke the stillness.

As they entered the inlet the twinkle of a light was seen ahead.

"The buccaneer is still there, Senor Captain," whispered the pilot.

"Yes; but how does she lie?"

"With bows toward yonder clump of pines, senor."

"Then she has her broadside toward us?"

"Yes, senor."

"Do you think she is still beached or is afloat?"

"It is hard to say, senor, as it depends upon the work they had to do upon her hull."

"Very well, we will at once advance, going ahead slowly until almost upon her, for we can surely board from our boats as the tide is in; but if not, when we ground we can leap overboard and advance upon her."

"Steady men, and follow the gig!"

The lowly-spoken order was heard by those in the boats nearest and passed to the others, and then the little fleet once more moved on.

Nearer and nearer until the schooner could just be distinctly seen, and her position showed that she was afloat.

Nearer and nearer, until, just as Basil Brent felt that they would give the buccaneers a complete surprise, suddenly a burning flame passed along the schooner's decks and half a hundred muskets poured a rain of bullets into the boats.

"Come, lads! board and carry her!" shouted Basil Brent, and the gig was urged forward, the fire having been delivered upon the boats ahead.

A wild cheer broke from the men, though it was mingled with shrieks of pain and groans, and the little fleet dashed upon the schooner.

But a second fire came with fearful effect and staggered them, and only the commanding voice of Basil Brent prevented a panic.

"Follow me, lads, and fight them on their own decks!"

As the gallant young leader spoke the gig touched the schooner's side, and he leaped on board, followed by his men.

But he was met by a terrific fire at close range, and he fell to the deck like one shot through the heart ere the other boats could support him.

The pirates gave vent to triumphant yells at this, while springing upon the bulwarks of the

schooner, and clinging with one hand to the fore-ratlines and holding a pistol in the other the pilot shouted in a voice heard by all:

"Die, you Red Sea cut-throat at the hand of Rafael Rodriguez!"

Brazos, the Buccaneer, fell at the crack of the mysterious avenger's pistol while the pilot sprung back into the gig and called out:

"They will destroy us, lads, if we stay! Pull for your lives!"

The men needed no second bidding. They were already demoralized by being surprised where they had expected to surprise. They had expected to find a vessel half a wreck, hampered with spars and work-benches, and with but a crew of hardly more than a third of its complement.

Instead, they found the schooner afloat, her decks cleared for action and seemingly a full crew, while they had been all ready to repulse the attack.

So the attacking force drew off in dismay, with the boats encumbered with dead and dying comrades, one boat sinking and two others badly crippled.

Until they were out of range the pirates fired upon them with small arms, for they did not care to let the thunder of their heavy guns be heard afar off, and to this fact the assailants owed it that they were not more severely dealt with than they were.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MAN OF MYSTERY.

THE pilot led the retreat in the gig, as he had in the advance, and the boats were urged swiftly through the water back toward the vessel which had brought them there, so full of hope and success.

Half a dozen men had been killed and double that number were wounded, so that the blow had been a severe one.

Silent and sullen the men pulled back, and the pilot hailed the vessel when a long way off:

"Ho! the brig, Sea Wing!"

"Ahoy! the boats!"

The answer came back in the voice of Bob Brent.

"Get your anchor up and set sail to run for it as soon as you pick us up!"

"Ay, ay," came the response, and the voice of Bob Brent was heard giving quick orders to the few men on board.

The anchor was soon up, the sails set, and as the brig gained headway, the gig ran alongside.

The Sea Wing was held up into the wind until the dead, wounded and unhurt men were on her decks, and then as she fell off and began to gain headway, the crew got the boats up to the davits.

Every eye was turned toward the shore, as though expecting to see the white sails of the Sea-Raider darting out from under the land shadows in full chase, while every stitch of canvas which the brig would bear was crowded on.

When the vessel was dashing along at her greatest speed under the pressure of the eight-knot breeze, Bob Brent turned to Rafael Rodriguez whom he had not before been able to question.

"Where is my brother, pilot?"

"Dead," was the laconic response.

"Dead?" and Bob Brent fairly gasped the word.

"He is."

"You are sure of this?"

"I saw him fall dead, senor."

The young sailor passed his hand several times across his forehead and half turned away.

He was moved by what he heard.

There was no feigning this, for he felt how quickly all had come about as he had planned, and the stings of conscience were keen and cruel, for not yet had he become hardened to crime.

"Dead! dead!" and he muttered the words over and over again.

Then he said:

"The expedition failed?"

"Yes, senor."

"Why was it?"

"The buccaneers, in some mysterious way, were aware of our attack, and surprised us instead of our surprising them."

"The first volley I heard fired was from the buccaneers?"

"Yes, senor, and the second also, for they gave us a complete surprise."

"And my brother?"

"Gained the deck of the schooner, with only a few of us at his back, and was shot dead in his tracks."

"Said he nothing?"

"He led his men like the brave man he was, senor, and a bullet pierced his brain, so he fell like a log."

"And then?"

"The rest of us were beaten off."

"But the pirate chief—Brazos?"

"Quickly followed your brother, senor."

"He, too, is dead?"

"Yes, senor; I saw to that."

"You have done good work this night," was the whispered response.

"Thank you," came the low reply, and there was sarcasm in the words and manner.

"You feared the Red Raider might follow us to sea?"

"Yes, senior."

"I hope not; but Moralez is a good officer, and may seek revenge."

"He is one to do so, senior, especially as he greatly liked his chief, so it is well for you to run down the coast under full sail and keep close in to make a port if chased, for the Sea Wing is no match for the Sea-Raider if she should follow us."

"True, and your advice is good."

"Take the deck and carry out your plan, for I am going below for awhile, as the death of my brother affects me deeply."

"Doubtless," said Rafael Rodriguez, quietly, as Bob Brent went below, and he stepped to the side of the helmsman and gave him orders what course to steer.

It was the afternoon of the second day after the disastrous attack upon the buccaneer schooner, and Boston lay but a few leagues away.

"Senior Rodriguez, have you decided upon your future course, as we are off the Boston Light, and I can put you on board of a smack and send you in?" said Bob Brent, addressing the pilot, whom he had sent for to come into the cabin.

"Oh yes, senior, I have accomplished the task I cut out for myself, in the death of Brazos the Buccaneer and so will go my way," was the indifferent response of the Cuban.

Bob Brent gazed at the man fixedly.

He was a mystery to him that he could not solve.

The man had the appearance of having been raised in refinement, and yet he had been but a common seaman on board the schooner, refusing, as Brazos had himself told Bob Brent one day when their attention was attracted to him during the transfer of a cargo, the offer of an officer's berth.

"You will not again follow piracy?"

"No, senior."

"Would you not like a berth as mate of a merchant vessel?"

"No, senior."

Bob Brent frowned.

He had hoped the man would accept his offer, for he felt that he held a dangerous secret against him.

"I will give you a first mate's berth if you will take it?" and as Bob Brent made the offer it occurred to him how easy it would be some stormy night at sea to get rid of one who had him in his power.

"No, Senior Brent, I will return to Cuba and be content, and I would feel obliged if you will put me on board some smack running into port."

"I will do so! but are you not in need of money?"

"I have all that I care for, senior, thank you."

Bob Brent bit his lip, for the mysterious sailor would not allow him to serve him in any way.

"Well, I will have no cause to fear him, so I will let him go his way," he muttered to himself, and soon after a fishing smack was hailed, and Rafael Rodriguez was put on board.

With a wave of the hand he bade farewell to Bob Brent and his crew, and thus they parted, but to meet again at some time in the future.

And while the little fishing smack bore the man of mystery on toward Boston the Sea Wing held on her course to the seaport to make known the sad tidings of the defeat of those who had started forth so full of hope to capture the Red Sea-Raider.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RETURN.

NORMA SPRAGUE was full of happiness after her engagement to Basil Brent, a happiness tinged only by the dread of evil to him, for she knew that he had gone upon a mission of desperate danger.

She had been pained by the confession of love from Bob Brent, a confession that would have pleased her had he told his love ere she had met his brother.

But meeting Basil Brent, Norma knew that he was the idol of her dreams, the one being in all the world whom she could love.

She was deeply attached to Bob Brent, she knew; but in his brother all hopes of future happiness were centered.

It was with a feeling of pain, therefore, at the sorrow she knew that Bob Brent felt, that she had seen him go away from her.

But it was upon Basil that her thoughts turned continually, and she longed and hoped for his coming back.

He had hinted to her that the expedition would add fame to his name, and that Bob, though the mover in it, had yielded to him the honor of full command.

More she did not know, and so with the other good people of G—, fathers, mothers, sisters and lovers, she was forced to wait the return of the expedition in anxious expectancy.

She was wont to go each day to the cupola of

Beacon Hill mansion, and while she sat there sewing or reading, her eyes were often turned far out upon the blue waters, hoping for the glance of a sail.

A sailor's daughter, and spending much of her time at sea, she was well acquainted with every part of a vessel, and she had noted the peculiarities of the Sea Wing, so as to know her well upon the return, no matter how far off she would sight her coming back.

One day, the eighth after the departure of the Sea Wing, Norma was seated in the cupola, and as it was late in the afternoon she had laid aside her sewing.

Her eyes had been fixed far out upon the sea, and suddenly she started as she beheld, close inshore, coming down the coast, a vessel under full sail.

"It is the Sea Wing!" she cried, as she seized a spyglass always kept in the cupola, and turned it upon the vessel.

"Yes, it is the Sea Wing!" and then as she spoke her eyes fell upon something which caused her to turn very white.

"The flag is displayed union down and half-mast."

"Oh! what has happened?"

A moment she stood there, the spyglass at her eye, and then she laid it down and remained like a statue, so silent, so motionless was she, until the Sea Wing rounded the point of land which formed the little harbor, and ran in toward an anchorage.

She saw that the townspeople had also seen the Sea Wing and noted her signal of distress, and scarcely daring to hope for the best, she feared the worst.

The shadows of twilight deepened around her before she left the cupola, and then she descended to the front piazza and began to pace to and fro.

Her heart was full of anguish, for somehow she felt that the blow was about to fall heaviest upon her.

She knew that her father was down in the tavern, but would soon return with the news.

She must wait, for she had not the courage to go down and find out herself why the Sea Wing had returned flying a signal of distress.

For a long time she waited, refusing to go to supper when called, and dreading greater evil when her father was not on time for the evening meal, for he was ever prompt.

The moon, on the wane, arose and dimmed the twinkling lights in the village, and the silvery radiance recalled that night just over a week before, when on the beach Basil Brent had told his love to her and she had made known to him that he was all the world to her.

"Ah! I can seem to hear the tolling of that bell, as then, and the vision of old Buccaneer Belmont's gallows monument appears before me," she said with a shudder, as she recalled the scene in the little churchyard that night.

Soon she saw a form approaching up the gravel walk.

It advanced slowly and the heavy tread of one foot convinced her that it was her father.

She tried to advance to meet him as he descended the steps, but instead sat down in one of the large chairs that were upon the piazza, while the piteous cry broke from her lips:

"Oh, father! what has happened?"

Commodore Sprague seemed very quiet, for he did not break forth in his usual hearty salute, but said, as he walked up to where his daughter sat:

"Do you know, little girl?"

"I know only, father, that I saw the Sea Wing come into port flying a signal of distress."

"Ah! I forgot that you have lived in the cupola of late, and I hoped to keep it from you until the morrow."

"Keep what from me, father?" and Norma grasped his arm.

"My child, I know that you have loved Basil Brent from the first, and it pains me to give your heart a cruel blow."

"He is dead?"

She asked the words in a calm manner, but it seemed like the calmness of despair.

"My dear Norma, he died like a brave man falling upon the deck of the pirate craft, where his men dared not follow him."

"Cowards!"

The words came through her shut teeth.

"No, Norma, they were our own brave people as you know."

"The expedition went to capture the celebrated pirate, Brazos the Red Sea-Raider, for the secret is out now."

"The truth is a man came to Bob Brent in Boston and told him he could pilot him to where the buccaneer craft was in hiding on the coast of Maine, and undergoing repairs."

"He claimed that he sought revenge against the Sea-Raider, and so Bob came home and told his brother, Lieutenant Basil Brent, and the expedition was gotten up as you are aware."

"Off Boston the Sea Wings lay to while Bob went after the pilot who was to take them to the hiding-place of the Sea-Raider."

"He was a Spaniard, the lads say, and did take them to the craft's retreat."

"Basil led the boat attack, going ahead in

the gig with the pilot, while Bob remained in command of the Sea Wing with half a dozen men or so.

"They expected to find the pirate all upset with repairs going on and a small crew, taking him wholly by surprise; but instead they were met, when close aboard, by a terrific fire of musketry which proved fatal to a number."

"But Basil Brent gained the deck of the schooner, the pilot being by his side, and the lads say that one of them killed the pirate captain."

"But Basil also fell, fairly riddled with bullets the lads told me, and the attacking force having suffered fearfully, and seeing that their enemy was then equal in numbers and held their ship handy, they were beaten back and forced to retreat to their vessel, which at once set sail in flight, fearing pursuit from the buccaneer."

"Off Boston Bob Brent hailed a fishing smack and sent the Spanish pilot into the port, and he was to send a vessel-of-war after the Sea-Raider, if there was any in the harbor."

"And Basil was left dead upon the deck of the pirate schooner?" asked Norma.

"Yes, my child," and her father seemed surprised at the calmness of the maiden; but a moment after she arose and started toward the door, when she reeled and would have fallen had not the old commodore caught her in his arms.

She had swooned away, and so white she looked, so limp, that it seemed strangely like death, and loud rung out the calls of the old sailor for help, and at his voice the servants came running to the scene, startled half out of their wits at his ringing shouts that echoed through and through the mansion.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A STRANGE PROCEEDING.

It was night when the little smack which the Cuban had taken landed him at a wharf in Boston.

He walked quietly along the streets, as though acquainted with the town, and made his way to a house upon a fashionable thoroughfare.

A key let him into the door, and in the hall a light burned dimly.

But ascending the steps to the second floor he halted at a door, and unlocking it, entered.

There was an air of respectability about the house, as revealed by the furnishing of the hall, and without doubt it was the abode of some one who, in reduced circumstances were willing to rent their rooms, furnished, to those who could pay well for them.

Lighting a lamp which stood upon a table in the room he entered, the Cuban glanced about him, and then seeing a bell, rung it.

It was not long before an old negress appeared in the doorway, and she seemed startled at sight of him.

"Don't be alarmed, Phillis, for your master sent me here to spend a few days, and, as you see, gave me his keys and told me to make myself at home, so I wish you to get me some supper."

The woman seemed reassured at the presence of a stranger by his words, and especially when he gave her a gold piece, and said:

"Mr. Conrad told me that I would find you caring for his rooms, and that you would look to my comfort as you would to his own."

"Yas, massa, I will, sah; but I was skeert at fu'st, as I wasn't expectin' Massa Conrad home for some time."

"I know, I sailed with him, and you remember I was here the day he moved in?"

"Yas, sah, I recomembers your face, sah."

"The other lodgers are still in the house, Phillis?"

"Oh, yas, sah, for dey owns it, sah."

"Well, I shall remain a few days, and as I am in sailor garb, as you see, will have to rig out in some of your master's clothing."

"You'll find 'em in the wardrobes, sah, for I dusts 'em off reg'lar."

"Thank you, and by the way Jet sent his regards to you."

"Thankee, sah, Jet am a nice man; but I'll git you some supper, sah."

"And a bottle of that rare old Burgundy your master has."

"Yas, sah," and Phillis disappeared with not the slightest thought that all was not as it should be.

She had lighted the lamps while she was there, and the same rooms were revealed where Conrad, the pretended planter, had taken Bob Brent and they had played their game of cards for the Golden Hope.

There were half a dozen pleasant rooms, all neatly furnished, and with a kitchen and chamber for Phillis in the rear.

The buccaneer had left his rooms just as though he had gone away for a very short while, and the Cuban proceeded to make himself perfectly at home there by rigging himself out in some clothing that he found there.

A silk dressing-gown and embroidered slippers were put on also, and then Phillis appeared to call him into the dining-room to supper.

With the air of a man who took life as it came, he enjoyed his supper, sipped his Bur-

gundy and afterward lighted a fragrant cigar, which he sat down to enjoy.

"Breakfast at nine, Phillis," he said, quietly.

"Yas, massa."

"An' here is market money."

"Keep the change."

She thanked him earnestly as she saw that the change would be about five times what the marketing came to.

"I gues-ses I'll git rich wid two such gem-mans as dem is to wait on," she said, as she went back to her quarters, determined that the visitor should live like a king while he was there.

After she was gone, Rafael Rodriguez leaned back in his easy-chair, and smoked with the air of a man who enjoyed every puff that he sent in curls from his mouth.

The night wore on, until midnight came, and then Rafael Rodriguez arose, and began to look about him.

There was a large desk in the room, but it was securely locked, and he had not the key.

An iron-bound chest was in the wardrobe, but this also was locked, and he had no key to open it.

"To-morrow I will get keys."

"Now to rest, for I am tired," he said, and soon after he had retired, and was sleeping soundly in the comfortable bed in the inner room.

Phillis awoke him half an hour before breakfast was ready, and he ate with a relish, greatly to her delight.

Then he dressed himself and went out.

After several hours he returned, and from his pocket he took a lot of skeleton keys, which he at once began to fit in the locks of the desk and chest, until he found two that would open them.

"Good!" he said, and taking the two keys from the bunch, he again went out, but returned for dinner, and Phillis was again delighted to see that he enjoyed all that she had set before him.

That night, soon after supper, Rafael Rodriguez began upon what seemed to have been the real object of his coming to the rooms of the buccaneer, for he first opened the desk with the skeleton key which he had fitted to the lock, and began to examine its contents.

There were a number of papers which he looked over, and selecting some of these, he put them carefully away.

Then he turned to the iron chest.

In this he found quite a treasure.

There were jewels, bracelets, necklaces and other articles of value.

Though with so much wealth at his command, he simply selected a necklace, of less value than others there, and to which was attached a locket containing a miniature.

Upon the likeness he gazed for some moments in silence, while a strange look rested upon his face.

Placing this aside with the papers he had taken, he took up a ring in which was a single stone, a ruby of rare size and beauty.

This he laid aside and closed the iron chest, while he began to pace the floor, as though in a thoughtful mood, a mood that was by no means a pleasant one; yet he smiled at times, but a grim, sardonic smile it was.

Again he sought rest, and the next morning at breakfast told Phillis that he would have to leave that day, and she heard the announcement with regret.

"Did your master have no word, Phillis, what was to be done with his things in case he should die?"

"He gave me a letter, massa, ter take ter Massa Allen, the big lawyer in town, sah, and said it would tell what he wanted, but that he guessed he'd git back all right."

"You have the letter, Phillis?"

"Yas, sah, it's yonder behind the clock."

Rafael Rodriguez did not even look in the direction indicated, but said, indifferently:

"I merely asked, for life is uncertain with the best of us."

"Yas, sah, so it be; but Massa Conrad said as how I was to leave all to Jet if he comed back without him; but if neither of them came, after the year was up, I was to take the letter to Massa Allen."

"All right, Phillis, here is a little present for you, as you have taken such good care of me," and Phillis was delighted with the very rich golden harvest she had reaped in so short a time.

That morning a trunk came to the rooms for Senor Rodriguez, and also a number of packages, evidently late purchases.

Soon after these were packed in the trunks, a carriage called, and attired in a stylish suit which he had purchased, the Cuban entered the vehicle and drove to the stage-office.

There he bought a ticket for the little seaport of G—, and one who had known him with full-bearded face, and long hair, in sailor garb, would not have recognized in the handsome, stylishly-dressed gentleman with clean-shaven face and short curls, the pilot who had led the disastrous expedition upon the Red Sea-Raider, and who, in sending a bullet into the body of Brazos the Buccaneer, seemed to have satiated the revenge he felt against him.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PLEDGE.

THE whole village of G— was in deep grief, for not only had a number of its brave sailor lads been slain, but others were wounded, and a gloom fell upon all.

The hope of success and fame for the young sailors had been foiled by defeat, and Basil Brent, admired by all, was mourned by all who had known him.

Yet no one thought of blaming Bob Brent for the disaster.

He had obtained news of the presence of the Red Sea-Raider in hiding at a certain point, and he had hoped to win fame and gold for all by the capture of the famous buccaneer.

He had failed to meet the success he had hoped for, and had to mourn for a brother and many brave comrades who had been his boyhood companions.

No one in G— seemed to look upon Bob Brent as having been the half-brother of Basil, for it had been forgotten almost that such was the case.

So they felt for him in the affliction, and never once dreamed how deep had been his plot.

As for Bob Brent he had gone at once to his home, after landing from the Sea Wing and making his report of the affair to Commodore Sprague and others.

Arriving at home he had again told the story to old Berry and Jule, and their wailing for Basil's untimely end sunk deep into his heart.

Anxious to get the matter off his mind as much as possible, he sat down and wrote out to the Secretary of the Navy a report of the affair, stating that his brother, Lieutenant Basil Brent, while home on leave, had been urged to take command of a vessel, with a volunteer crew, to capture the Red Sea-Raider, as there was no ship-of-war at that time in those waters.

He spoke of his brother's desperate courage and dying upon the deck of the pirate craft, and having dispatched this communication was in hopes that there would be nothing more said about it, in the way of an investigation.

The next day, to his sorrow, he learned that Norma was lying at the point of death, and he hastened over to Beacon Hill to hear the truth.

The commodore met him and told him that he had feared for the life of his daughter at first, but that she had at last come out of her swoon and had rallied, so that there was every hope that she would soon be herself again, though the blow had seemed to be a severe one.

"I do not understand, Bob, how it all came about, this love between my child and Lieutenant Basil; but certain it is that they did love each other, and all the time I looked upon you as the intended husband of Norma, for somehow it seemed that she belonged to you."

"I have always felt the same, commodore, and it was perhaps for this reason I never had asked her to be my wife until too late."

"Too late, Bob?" asked the commodore, with surprise.

"Well, sir, I never spoke to her upon the subject until the day we sailed on that disastrous expedition, and then I found I was too late, for she already loved my poor brother."

"Well, boy, she will mourn for him her spell, and then the field is open to you, for you certainly have my good-will in courting her."

"But now I must return to her, so you will excuse me and come over to-morrow, for I know she will see you, as she said she wished to hear all from your lips."

Bob Brent winced at this, but, promising to call upon the morrow, took his departure, and wended his way back to Overlook.

The next day was the Sabbath, and a servant came over in the afternoon to ask Captain Bob Brent to please call at Beacon Hill, as Miss Norma wished to see him.

The man's heart throbbed violently at the request.

He felt that he had to pass through the severest ordeal yet.

He had loved, fairly idolized, Norma since she was a mere child, and when he had saved her from dying amid the flames he felt that she belonged to him.

He had always been slighted by his father, after his mother's death, for his brother Basil, and this had caused a certain bitterness to grow up in his heart against him.

To a young and handsome lad, mate of a fine ship, who had asked Commodore Sprague for his daughter, the old seaman had responded that he was rich and would not let his daughter marry a poor man unless he wore the uniform of a naval officer.

If any other got her, he must be able to match her fortune with one of his own.

This had reached the ear of Bob Brent, and was, perhaps, with his love of gold, which led him to gamble to secure it, what caused him to be tempted into running in smuggled goods.

He was determined to match Norma's fortune when he asked her to become his wife.

With this in view he had plotted and sinned, and when Basil came between him and his love he was led very readily to commit a greater crime to get rid of his brother.

With the Sea-Raider dead, and Basil out of

the way, nothing stood between him and Norma that he could see.

So it was that he felt keenly when he had to face Norma, to see her sorrow which his act had caused, and he entered the library at Beacon Hill with the feeling that he would give all that he possessed to undo what he had done.

To his surprise Norma came forward and greeted him with a face that was very pale, very sorrowful but calm.

He had expected to see her bowed down with grief.

"Bob, I sent for you, because I wished to have a talk with you and heard that you were to sail soon."

"Yes, I leave in a couple of days, Norma, to join my vessel at Boston and start upon a voyage to the West Indies," he said.

"I will be sorry to have you go, Bob, for, although I told you I could not give you the love you sought, yet I feel the deepest regard for your noble nature, and appreciate all that you have been to me."

"Now tell me, Bob, all about this sad, this fatal expedition."

He was more and more surprised at her calmness, and felt confused in her presence.

At last he said:

"Norma, I acted, as I believed, for the best, and gave up my chance to Basil, hoping he would add to his fame by the capture of the Sea-Raider, while he was away from his vessel on leave."

"Through some means the pirate was ready for us and the surprise was so great that our lads were beaten off, my poor brother falling dead upon the deck of the schooner."

"This is all I can tell you, Norma; but as the Sea-Raider was also killed I hope that his vessel will soon be taken."

"I hope so," and she was silent for a moment, and then said:

"Bob, did your brother leave me no letter, and you no writing, as to what he wished done, should he fall?"

"Yes, Norma, he left for you this letter, which, as I know its contents, through a few lines to myself, I did not intend to hand to you until I had gone to sea."

She took the letter, broke the seal and read aloud, without a quiver of her voice:

"AT SEA

"ON BOARD BRIG SEA WING."

"MY OWN DEAR NORMA:—

"When this letter is placed in your hands, I will be no more, for I have left orders that it be given you only in case of my death."

"You remember, Norma, that when you promised to be my wife, and talking together after an engagement we felt sure that my noble brother Bob loved you, you pledged yourself to be his wife should I be taken from you?"

"Now, Norma, it is my last wish that you shall keep that pledge, for I am more and more convinced that Bob loves you with all his soul and that I stole you from him."

"To Bob I leave all that I possess, and thus to you also, for, Norma, fail not to keep your pledge made to me that night on the beach, and this pleading from the dead."

"Until death,

"Your devoted

"BASIL."

The man shuddered as she read the words, try as he might to conceal all emotion.

For a moment the lips of the girl quivered; but she had nerved herself to meet the ordeal bravely, and so said when she had finished reading the letter:

"Bob, I am ready to keep my pledge six months from to-day if so you wish it."

"Do you, for if not and I break my word to poor dead Basil, then I am not to blame for it."

Had he been a better reader of human nature than he was, he would have seen that she was in hopes that he would refuse to hold her to the pledge.

But he was not, and in his vanity he believed that she really loved him the best, for her calm manner deceived him, as did the fact that she was ready to keep her pledge.

He did not see the inner grief, beyond the sight of mortal man, and so he said:

"I love you, Norma, as you well know, and now that Basil stands not between us, I will ask you to keep your pledge six months from to-day."

He did not observe the look that passed over her beautiful face, as she responded:

"I will keep my pledge, Bob; but now say good-by, for I am not well."

Thus they parted, for two days after Bob Brent left home, and a week after sailed from Boston in the Golden Hope, bound upon his voyage to the West Indies.

CHAPTER XX.

A STRANGER IN G—.

THE very stage that carried Bob Brent away from G—, on the way to Boston, had brought in a few hours before a passenger whose appearance in the little town had created something of a stir.

He had put up at the Pot Luck Inn, the very best tavern in the town, and whose landlord was known to set a most tempting table, in spite of the name he had given his place.

The stranger had been welcomed by Mine

Host Berry with a kindly smile and an invitation to take the dust of the road out of his throat before he went up to his room with something hot.

The stranger had declined the invitation, but told Landlord Berry that he wished a "bottle of his best" for supper; and more, he desired the most comfortable room in the house.

"It's high-priced, sir," said the landlord.

"It matters not about the price, and I want the best of everything."

That settled it with Landlord Berry, who showed him to the best room, one which George Washington had slept in for a week some years before, when he had visited the town, and a special servant was called to look to the comfort of the guest who made money no object, so as he got what he wanted.

At supper the stranger guest invited Landlord Berry to join him in discussing the bottle of wine, which he was pleased to pronounce most excellent, with the air of one who knew.

The stranger had a foreign look, though he spoke English only with a slight accent, and he had given his name and occupation as Don Rafael, gentleman.

He told the landlord that he was traveling in the States for pleasure and expected to remain a week or two in his pretty village.

He liked the wine so well that he called for a second bottle and seemed to take good care to keep the glass of Landlord Berry filled.

Under its mellow influence the tongue of the landlord wagged in a lively way and he imparted to the stranger all the news of the town, dwelling with particular emphasis upon the fact that they had lately met with a dire misfortune in the death of a number of their young men, and the wounding of more, in an attempt to capture a West Indian pirate, while their brightest lad, Basil Brent, the leader of the expedition, had fallen on the deck of the buccaneer.

The stranger listened with marked interest and said:

"You say that the leader was a naval officer?"

"Yes, sir, and handsome, brave and rich."

"His name was—"

"Lieutenant Basil Brent."

"Had he much of a family?"

"None, sir, for he was not married, being in his twenties; but he did have a brother, Bob is his name and he's captain in the merchant service and commands his own craft, the fleetest keel afloat they do say."

"It was Bob who got up the expedition and got his brother to be leader, and his death hurts him terribly, for he has gone to sea before his time, I believe, which was set for his sailing."

"He is not here then now?"

"No, sir, left to-night on the stage for Boston."

"And he now gets his brother's property?"

"Of course, sir, for there's no other as Lieutenant Brent was not married."

"I see; but is it much of a property?"

"The estate is a rich one, sir, and Overlook Mansion the finest in these parts, though Bob, who has lived there, has let it run to weed."

"And are there many other rich people in your village, landlord?"

"There's plenty snugly off, sir; but the commodore is the richest of all."

"What commodore?"

"Sprague is his name, sir, and we call him commodore because he was captain of a privateer."

"He lost his leg in battle and came here to live, having a fine little pile of prize money laid aside, and he's got the prettiest daughter that ever the sun shone on and folks did think she was going to marry Cap'n Bob Brent, until his brother the handsome lieutenant came home on leave, and then her eyes seemed dazzled by the brass buttons he wore, and 'twas said she had fallen in love with him and sent Bob adrift."

"I see; but what said her parents?"

"She has only her father, the commodore, her mother having died when she was a mere baby, they say."

"And how old is she?"

"It's hard to tell a woman's age, sir, unless you follow 'em up year by year from the cradle, but I believe she is about eighteen, or thereabout."

"But don't you like the wine, sir?"

Thus admonished, the stranger dashed off his glass and refilled it, after he had done the same for the landlord.

"You say she is beautiful?"

"As beautiful as a twinkling star, sir, while she has the form of a fairy."

"All of our lads are in love with her; but they stand no chance, I'm thinking, for as the lieutenant got killed, it's just like a woman to take back her brother now."

"Yes, women are strange beings," mused the stranger, as though speaking aloud his thoughts. Then he was silent awhile, as though communing with his own fancies.

Then he broke the silence with:

"What have you of interest about your pretty village to interest a stranger?"

"There's the harbor, sir, and the vessels, with the fishing fleet, the fine beach and the woods and hills."

"Then, there is Overlook Mansion, well worth seeing, with Beacon Hill, the commodore's home."

"I suppose I might see Overlook, as its master is away; but I do not know the commodore, so would not dare venture to intrude."

"It would be no intrusion, sir, for the commodore comes here often, and I'll introduce you."

"Then you just ask him to join you in a bottle of this rare wine, and he'll do it, and then invite you up to try some that he's got, which he says is better; but I guess it is not, for I sold him what he has, and the shade is in favor of this," and the landlord emptied his glass with great gusto, for it was not often that he indulged in the really fine wine which he had set before his guest.

"Is there aught else of interest, landlord, about your village?"

"Why of course there is, and I came near forgetting it, for there's the graveyard."

"Ah!"

"It's a pretty spot, sir, calm and peaceful, and situated over near the shore, with a stone church and the dead lying about it; but in one corner, sir, over by the stile near the beach, is a grave you might wish to see."

"Whose is it?"

"It's the grave of a noted sea-rover, sir, Belmont the Buccaneer was his name."

"He was captured by a naval officer long years ago and brought here and hanged, and somebody put over his grave a tomb that represents a gallows."

"There it is, sir, with rope hanging from it and skull and cross-bones engraven on one side above the name of the buccaneer."

"I would like to see the grave with its strange monument, so shall go there to-morrow."

"Let it be only by day, sir, for never pass the spot by moonlight, as the grave is said to bring bad luck upon all who see it after sunset, and not a soul in this town is there, not even the sexton, who will dare pass there by night," and the landlord spoke earnestly for he was as superstitious as a sailor and thoroughly believed in the efficacy of the pirate's grave to bring bad luck upon all who saw it by night.

The stranger looked at his watch and said:

"The moon is about rising, landlord, so I will take a walk about your village."

"Which way lies the pirate's grave, for I have no fear of it and wish to take a look at it by moonlight," and as the surprised landlord made no reply, seemingly dazed at the daring of his guest, the stranger arose with a laugh and went to his room.

But soon after he went forth for a walk, and after half an hour found himself in full view of the peaceful little cemetery upon which the moon streamed down in brilliant radiance that lit up every tomb and grave.

CHAPTER XXI.

A STRANGE MEETING.

NORMA SPRAGUE'S calm manner was forced.

She was a woman in feeling, though but a girl in years, and she had had a short dream of happiness in her love for Basil Brent, which had been indelibly stamped upon her heart.

Nothing but death could efface the memory of those few weeks of happiness, and yet she meant not that others should see her suffer.

She took a real delight in carrying out the wish of Basil Brent that she should marry his brother Bob if harm befell him.

Had it been that she did not like Bob Brent then it might have been otherwise.

But she did like him, for she knew not his black heart as it was.

His handsome face and pleasant, devil-I-care manners hid the villain within.

She had pledged her word to Basil that she would marry Bob, if he died, and she had told the latter that she meant to keep her word.

So it was that they parted, Norma feeling not a regret at their parting, and in fact it was with real relief that she saw him depart.

As the night wore on she began to pace up and down the piazza.

Her father seeing that she preferred to be left alone in her grief did not disturb her.

At length in the eastward there appeared a rosy light.

She gazed upon it an instant, and the thought came to her that it was a ship on fire at sea.

But the rosy hue turned into silver radiance and soon above the ocean appeared the moon.

She gazed upon it as though enraptured with its beauty, and at last said:

"What need I fear?"

"Who can harm me?"

"I will have no dread but go to the spot on the beach where he told me of his love, go there and vow to be to Bob Brent all that I would have been to him."

She slipped into the hallway and soon returned with a snowy mantle which she drew over her head and wound about her form.

As her dress was also white, she looked startlingly spectral in the moonlight, as she glided along the ridge path leading to the beach.

The ridge ended abruptly at the shore, and thereon was built a summer retreat, or lookout, where the villagers were wont to go on pleasant

afternoons and get the cool breezes from the sea, while they had a superb view for miles around them.

At the base of the ridge was the little church and its burying-ground, and beyond this, across a small stream was the village.

All about her as she went along was lighted up by the moon, and she could not but admire the scene as she went along.

Going down the pathway, leading from the ridge Norma turned into the road direct to the churchyard.

She paused as she put her foot upon the step of the stile, and seemed to dread passing through the graveyard.

But nerving herself to fear nothing she cleared the stile and went directly on toward the shore.

Her path wound about among the graves, and the headstones looked grim and ghostly in the moonlight.

But she did not falter and went bravely on her way.

She dared not look at the ghastly tomb of Belmont the Buccaneer, so turned her head away as she hurried by.

Over the stile at the sea end of the graveyard she went, and, descending to the beach she soon stood by the rock where Basil Brent and herself had last stood together.

She leant heavily upon the massive rock, while over her swept the memory of the love scene there, his words of tenderness, her pledge and all.

She recalled his last utterances to her, their parting, and felt that her love was as dead as the others in the graves upon the hillside.

Love Bob Brent she did, but it was not as she loved Basil.

For a long time these memories flitted over her and at last the tide of grief burst forth in a torrent from the fountain of tears, and with her hands thrown across the rock, as though embracing it, her face bent upon its cold surface, her heart pressed against it, she sobbed as though her very heart would break.

Not a tear had she shed before, and thus was Nature aiding the pent-up soul to cast off its anguish.

For a long time she wept bitterly, until at last, tired out, she sunk down upon a smaller rock to rest. At last she started to her feet, for she recalled how long she had been there.

Under the desperate tension in which her nerves had been, she had come to that desolate spot alone, passing through the graveyard to do so.

Now, with her anguish relieved by tears, the strain upon her nervous nature removed in a measure, she felt how bold had been her act, and she started to return home, for she realized how reckless she had been.

As she ascended the cut in the bank to the graveyard, she suddenly came face to face with a man.

He was tall, dressed in black, and barred her way.

The moonlight fell full upon his face and form, and she halted as though a ghost stood in her path.

For her life she could not have spoken, and she stood like one glued to the spot.

But the man came quickly to her relief, for he doffed his hat with marked courtesy, while he said, in a voice that had a strangely sympathetic tone to it:

"Pardon me, lady, but this is a dreary spot for you, by night and alone."

"May I offer my services as an escort to your home?"

"I thank you, sir, from my heart I thank you, and will be glad to have you go at least part of the way," and Norma gave a sigh of relief and spoke earnestly, though her voice quivered perceptibly.

"I am a stranger in your town, and lured by the beauty of the night, came out from the tavern for a stroll, while, wending my steps here, I saw you on the beach yonder."

He explained his presence so readily that Norma had confidence in him, and she knew that he had seen her in her grief, so she said:

"It was wrong for me to come here, sir, alone and by night; but I was lured to do so by the memory of one who stood by yonder rock with me not two weeks ago, and who is now dead," and the man saw tears glistening like diamonds in the eyes of the beautiful girl.

"You have my deepest sympathy, miss, in your affliction; but let me urge you not to be so rash as to come here again at night alone."

"My name is Don Rafael, and I am stopping a few days in your pretty village, at the Pot Luck Inn."

"Will you accept my arm?"

He was so gentle in his manner, so gentlemanly that she could not refuse, and said:

"Thank you, sir, I will, for I do not feel very strong."

"My name is Norma Sprague, and my home is some distance from here."

He turned and offered his arm, while he seemed to gaze upon her with a strange look.

Over the stile he aided her, and, as they went along, asked:

"Where is the grave of Belmont the Buccaneer, miss?"

"Before us—you see it now, that tall, dark stone shaped like a gallows."

"Ah, yes, I see it now, and missed it as I entered from another part of the graveyard."

"Do not let us stop, sir, I pray you, for I am superstitious about this stone, for it brings bad luck upon all that view it by moonlight, the villagers say," and she urged him on at a more rapid gait.

"I will hasten on with you, miss, but I do not believe in superstitious stories regarding it."

"Why, I have just met you here by moonlight, almost in its shadow," and he smiled.

"And he whom I last saw right here where you are, is dead, and that was not two weeks ago," she said, impressively.

The stranger made no reply, but walked rapidly along with her, over the stile and up the path to the ridge.

Reaching the gate leading into the grounds of Beacon Hill he said:

"I will leave you here, unless you wish me to see you to your door."

"No, thank you, sir, I will go on alone, for it is but a few steps; but I am ever so grateful to you for your goodness to me," and Norma held forth her hand.

He grasped it warmly and said:

"I would so much like to see you again, so can I hope to do so to-morrow afternoon before sunset?"

"It would hardly be right, sir."

"Trust me when I say that it will not be wrong."

He seemed to have gained a strange influence over her and she said:

"You have been so kind to me, sir, I will come then."

With this she departed, while Don Rafael turned and wended his way slowly toward the Pot Luck Inn, where Host Berry met him at the door.

"Did you go to the graveyard, sir?"

"Yes, and saw the pirate's monument."

"It looks strangely weird in the moonlight," and he went on to his room, while Landlord Berry set him down as being a very brave man to visit the grave of Belmont the Buccaneer by night.

CHAPTER XXII.

DON RAFAEL HAS A SECRET.

THE distinguished-looking stranger, registered at the Pot Luck Inn as Don Rafael, created quite a flutter in the quiet village of G— as he walked along the streets.

His elegant attire, gold-headed cane and aristocratic air, with his fine form and dark, handsome face won the admiration of all.

He passed many a man whom he remembered to have seen upon the Sea Wing, in the disastrous expedition to attack the Red Sea-Raider; but, though they would stare hard at him, not one seemed to connect the elegant stranger in G— with the pilot, Rodriguez, as he was only known on the vessel.

The Don dropped into the shops and made a few purchases; talked with the seamen on the wharves, and was most courteous to all.

Host Berry excelled himself in preparing a tempting dinner for his guest, and was again invited to join him in a bottle of the rare old wine.

As they sat at table together, the landlord said:

"So you went to the cemetery last night, sir?"

"Oh, yes."

"And saw the tomb over the pirate?"

"Yes, and an odd one it is too."

"Suitable to the man, don't you think, sir, for he was a bloody pirate?"

"Oh, yes, far more in keeping with his character than are most monuments erected to the dead," was the reply.

"You are a brave man, sir."

"Thank you."

"Not another soul in this town would dare go there by night, unless it would be that reckless fellow Bob Brent."

"The young merchant captain I heard you speak of?"

"Yes, sir, and he does not fear man, ghost or devil."

"That is the style of man I like; but I saw some one there last night, landlord."

"In the graveyard?"

"Yes."

The eyes of the host opened wide.

"You saw some one in the graveyard last night?"

"Yes."

"Who was he?"

"A form all robed in white passed through the graveyard, walked upon the beach, rested awhile at a rock on the sands and then returned to the cemetery."

"It was a ghost, sir, a spirit," and the landlord, eschewed the wine and dashed off a glass of spirits, as though to help his courage.

"She certainly looked like a ghost, landlord."

"It was, sir, it was; but I warned you and you did not heed me."

"I do not dread meeting the white-robed form, landlord."

"She will be your death, sir, for death al-

ways follows seeing Belmont the Buccaneer's grave by moonlight, and when the bell in the church belfry tolls by night, as it sometimes does."

"I'll take my chances on that, landlord," returned the Don, and with a laugh at the fears of Host Berry, he arose from the table and went to his room.

There he dressed himself with usual care and then set forth to keep his appointment in the graveyard with Norma Sprague.

He entered over the stile and spent half an hour looking over the headstones, and then wended his way to the weird tomb of the buccaneer.

It was indeed a strange monument, built of redstone and in the exact shape of a gallows.

Beneath it, swinging parallel with the gallows-beam was the grave, at the foot of which, stuck muzzle down, was an old ship's cannon.

Upon the stone, neatly carved, was a skull and crossbones, and beneath was the following:

"BELMONT, THE BUCCANEER,

"LIES

"AT THE FOOT OF THIS STONE GALLOW.

"Hanged for his Crimes of Piracy upon the High

"Seas,

"April 15th, 17—.

"Accursed be His Grave."

A strange look rested upon the face of the man as he read the strange inscription.

Then, with a sigh, he turned and walked away to the stile near the beach.

In a short while after seating himself there he saw Norma approaching.

She saw him, too, so he did not approach her, but awaited her coming.

"How very beautiful she is," he said, as he saw her face, which was flushed now, as though at meeting him.

"I have kept my word, sir, though I should not have done so," she said.

"You have done no harm, my child," he returned, in a soft, gentle tone, and at his calling her child, she looked into his face and saw that he was older than she had thought he looked in the moonlight, for he was beyond his fortieth year, though remarkably young-looking for a man who had registered two-score.

"I wanted to have you come, for I took a deep interest in you last night, and was anxious to meet you again."

"The truth is I wished to know more of you."

"May I ask who it was for whom you wept so bitterly last night?"

"One, sir, who was my friend, and who was very dear to me."

"Do not consider me rude, but let me ask you if you have a lover?"

"Yes, sir," and strange to say her face did not flush.

"Is he very dear to you?"

"He is, or I would not be engaged to him."

"Then rumor was wrong, she was not engaged to Lieutenant Brent," muttered the Don.

Then he said:

"I hope that your lover is all that you could wish in a true man?"

"He is, sir."

"And you are happy?"

"But for the grief that has fallen upon me I would be, sir."

"I thank you; but you have no mother, have you?"

"No, sir, my mother died long years ago."

"And your father?"

"I live with him at Beacon Hill, where I know that he would be glad to have you call; but I did not tell him of my coming here last night and meeting you."

"He would scold you for it?"

"Oh no, sir, for he never says an unkind or cross word to me, dear, noble father that he is."

"It must be a great boon to have a loving father, my child; but I will not detain you longer, for twilight is coming upon us."

"But here, I wish you to take this as a gift from me, this chain with the locket attached."

"In the locket is a miniature likeness, an image that will be a shield to you from all harm."

"Wear it at all times and simply say that it was given to you by a stranger—one whom you met at your mother's grave, for this is her grave," and as the Don spoke he halted by the side of a grave above which was a marble slab bearing the inscription:

"TO THE MEMORY OF

"VICTORINE,

"LOVED WIFE OF RUFUS SPRAGUE.

"May her ashes rest in peace."

"Yes, this is my mother's grave, sir; but how were you aware of it?" asked Norma in surprise.

"That is my secret, my child, but farewell and do not fail to wear the locket I have given you, for it will be a charm to guard you against all ill-fortune."

"Again farewell, Norma," and Don Rafael departed quickly ere Norma could detain him.

She called to him, but he walked swiftly on his way, and with amazement depicted upon every feature she started homeward.

A few steps she walked then paused, and opened the locket.

A cry escaped her lips and then came the words:

"It is a likeness of my mother!"

She hastened on home full of wonderment, for a portrait of her mother hung in her own room, just such a likeness in all detail, as the miniature.

What could it mean?

Her father was absent, and impatiently she awaited his coming.

He was wont on certain nights to indulge in a game of whist with a few convivial spirits down in the village, and so Norma sat up to await his return.

At last he came, and she told him that a stranger, one calling himself Don Rafael, had met her at her mother's grave and placed about her neck the chain with the gem-studded locket attached.

"What does it mean, father?" she asked.

The old commodore turned very pale, but he said:

"I cannot understand it all, my child."

"It is the miniature likeness of your mother, so wear it, as he told you, but let us not try to solve the mystery."

"Good-night," and the commodore returned to his room as though to retire; but when all was still he slipped out of the house and went down to the Pot Luck Inn, where Norma had told him the stranger was putting up.

But Don Rafael had departed hours before upon the stage for Boston, so Mine Host Berry told him, and with him went the secret he held, for if the commodore knew he did not care to reveal it to Norma.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A STRANGE SAIL IN SIGHT.

BRAZOS the Buccaneer as he called himself, and the Red Sea-Raider as he was known, after the name of his schooner, was a very cautious man.

He had been told by one of his men who was with him in Boston of the death of the seaman Rodriguez, and yet he had not wholly believed the story as he heard it.

He had noted the man Rodriguez particularly, and there was something in his face which led him to believe he had seen him somewhere before.

He had suggested this to him, but Rodriguez had told him he was mistaken.

A good reader of human nature, Brazos had discovered that the sailor was no ordinary man.

He was evidently one who had been well born, and, having shown himself a thorough sailor, he had been offered an officer's berth on the schooner.

This, however, he had refused, greatly to the surprise of the buccaneer.

Then he had been offered the berth of boatswain, and this was refused.

Even the place of coxswain had been declined, the strange sailor preferring to remain as an ordinary seaman.

So from these refusals, and the fact that he believed he had met him somewhere before, Brazos kept his eye upon Rodriguez.

When, therefore, the man reported that he had been killed in a broil with sailors in a low dive, and his body cast into the harbor by night, he decided that this might not be the truth.

Taking the story with a grain of allowance, he determined to at once return to his schooner.

So he got his supplies and all other purchases on board the little craft he had chartered, and which chartering meant, in his own mind, to return or not as he pleased, and set sail for the hiding-place of his vessel.

He arrived to find the men working leisurely upon the hull, for they could only take advantage of the low tide to do the work.

But his coming stirred them into life, and the very next low tide found the hull finished, and at high tide she was afloat and anchored in deep water.

Then the entire crew were set to work bending on the new sails, rigging new spars, painting and cleaning ship generally.

The result of this was that the schooner was in pretty fair trim to be ready to sail in a couple of days.

Going upon the cliff one day, Brazos took a look about him, and his well-trained eye at once fell upon a distant sail.

She was standing close inshore, and apparently heading so as to get nearer after nightfall.

There were no ports near, nothing to bring the vessel that near inshore unless for a purpose.

What that purpose was Brazos surmised.

"She is coming after me," he said.

Then he went to the cliff overhanging the harborage and lailed his schooner.

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Send me my strongest glass, and let Coxswain Mordecai bring it to me."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Officer Morales,

The coxswain soon after appeared on the cliff with a large spy-glass in his hand.

"Thank you, Mordecai, I wanted it to have a look at yonder craft," said Captain Brazos, as he leveled the glass.

But he was not looking through it, for his eye was upon the seaman.

The latter, however, did not observe this but had his gaze upon the distant vessel.

"I thought she was a cruiser, Mordecai, but I now see that she is not.

"Her decks, however, are crowded with men, though I cannot see a gun on board.

"What do you think she can be?"

"I don't know, sir," was the answer, and as he spoke Mordecai glanced toward the pirate chief, but the eye of Brazos was at once placed to the glass.

"Do you not think, Seaman Mordecai, that it may be a craft piloted by that deserter, Rodriguez, coming to attack us?"

The sailor started and turned pale, and at once bent his gaze upon his captain; but quick as he was Brazos was quicker, and his eye was to the glass.

"But he was killed, sir, if you mean the man who went with us to Boston," and Mordecai seemed very uneasy.

"Yes, he is the man I mean.

"You saw him killed, did you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"So you told me; but tell me just how it was."

"Well, sir, we met with a lot of sailors out of Havana and went to a low saloon to drink with them, and I think one recognized my mate as an old enemy, for he whispered to his companions and then they picked a quarrel with him."

"Yes."

"I tried to stand by my mate, but in the trouble that followed, he was knifed by some one and so I ran out."

"Well, Mordecai?"

"I waited outside, for I dared not tell an officer, knowing you could not appear, and after dark saw them take a body out and throw it into the water from the end of the dock.

"Then I returned and reported it to my other mates."

"How much did Rodriguez give you, Seaman Mordecai, for concocting this lie so that he could desert and be considered dead?"

The man turned deadly pale, and taken off his guard, he cried:

"Oh, Senior Captain! You have seen Rodriguez then!"

"Mercy, captain, mercy! but I did not think he would harm you or his old comrades, and I got a snug sum by it."

"Where is the money, Mordecai?"

"Here, sir, in this belt about my waist."

"Give it up."

"Yes, chief, yes," and the belt was taken off and held out to Brazos in the trembling hand of the bribe-taker.

"Drop it at my feet, sir!"

It was done.

"Now, Mordecai, I am convinced that yonder craft comes here under the pilotage of Rodriguez to attack my vessel, and you are to blame for it."

"Mercy, Senior Captain."

"Now you shall have your choice, Seaman Mordecai, either to return on board the schooner and be strung up at the yard-arm, or you can leap to your death from off this cliff, down into the basin where the crew can see you."

"Oh, mercy, dear senior!"

"You might as well ask mercy of the rocks upon which you stand, Mordecai— No! don't get vicious and attack me, or I'll have you die by torture," and Brazos leveled a pistol at the man, as he saw in his eyes that he was meditating a spring upon him.

The seaman was thoroughly cowed and hung his head, his whole form quivering with terror.

"March toward the cliff overhanging the basin, Seaman Mordecai.

"I will follow."

The man silently obeyed, and behind him walked Brazos, the Buccaneer, his pistol in his hand.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SAILOR'S LEAP.

ACROSS the narrow stretch of rock, from the cliff overhanging the sea to the one that looked sheer down a hundred feet into the basin where the schooner Sea-Raider lay at anchor, the man Mordecai walked, followed by his merciless chief.

As he reached the edge of the cliff, Mordecai halted and glanced back at the buccaneer captain.

His face was as pallid as though he was dead, and his teeth were set upon his lips until they cut into the flesh.

It was just growing twilight, and the schooner at anchor in the basin was already being shut in by the shadows of coming night.

But the two men on the cliff were boldly relieved against the sky, and all eyes were turned upon them from the schooner, when the hail of Brazos the Buccaneer rung out:

"Ho, the Sea-Raider, ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, sir," responded Officer Moralez.

"This man, Seaman Mordecai, is a traitor, for I have here the gold with which he was bribed to report Seaman Rodriguez dead, when the truth is he deserted."

Up from the deck in a fierce chorus came the words:

"Kill him!"

The men realized that when one of their number proved traitor, he must be made an example of.

They knew that their own safety depended upon weeding out from their midst all traitors, to let others who might be tempted to betray them know that there would be no mercy shown them.

"Men, out on the sea comes a vessel toward this basin, and though unarmed her decks are crowded with men, while my strongest glass showed me that she carries double the number of boats necessary for such a craft."

"Kill him!" again came the savage chorus from the deck of the schooner.

"That she is coming to attack us I feel assured, so, Officer Moralez, get the schooner in the best shape you can to withstand a boat attack, as they will not dare run in here with an unarmed vessel.

"But, first, let all behold the doom of this man."

"Ay, ay, sir!" shouted the men, and their voices showed that they held no mercy for their treacherous comrade.

"Mercy, Senior Captain, mercy! Spare me and I'll serve you to my dying day. I meant no harm against you, dear senior; but the gold tempted me to do as Rodriguez asked. Spare me, senior, spare me!"

The man had dropped on his knees, unheeding the wild shout of derision that went up from the Sea-Raider's crew at his act, and his hands were stretched forth appealingly to the buccaneer chief.

But Brazos was a man without mercy, as his dark face plainly revealed.

He uttered no word to the touching appeal, but the man seemed to realize that pleading was useless, and with a groan he sprung to his feet.

"Seaman Mordecai, your seconds of life are numbered, and your means of going out of this world is to leap from this cliff into the basin."

"The depth just there I do not know; but if it is deep, you may escape, and if shallow you will surely die the instant you go beneath the waters."

"If you escape with your life, your punishment will be over, for I shall not dog a man who has carried out the sentence passed upon him. Now, sir, face yonder schooner."

The man obeyed in silence, and his eyes fairly glared down into the dark depths below.

But he could barely see the water, as darkness had wrapped the basin in its sable mantle, though on the cliff all was yet light.

"Have you aught to say, Seaman Mordecai?"

"Nothing."

"No last wishes to leave?"

"You have my gold, and it is all that I have. It is blood-stained gold, for I got it under your command, Captain Brazos, under your red flag."

"And you earned it, for you carried your neck in a noose to get it."

"Were I sure that you would not betray me, I would ask you to obey a dying wish."

"Well?"

"Can I trust you?"

"I would not lie to a dying man, Seaman Mordecai."

"Well, Captain Brazos, I have parents who are poor, for ill-fortune swept from my father his riches. He is an old man now, and dwells in a country town, living with my brother, who is a clergyman of the Episcopal Church, and who supports my parents and sister.

"I was a black sheep, and ran away from home to go to sea, and you see to what it has brought me—piracy and the death I now must suffer."

"In that belt is my fortune, and it amounts to some seven thousand dollars, in gems and gold. It would make my parents comfortable in their old age, and I wish they could have it, if they could receive it without the thought that it was gained by piracy, for it would crush my noble mother's heart, and bow my beautiful sister's head with shame to know that their son and brother, Mark Mordecai, was a pirate."

"If you will send it to them, first putting the value in bank-notes, and will say that I was lost at sea and left it to them, I will bless you with my dying breath."

"I will do so, Mordecai, upon my honor, even though it be a pirate's honor," earnestly said the buccaneer.

"And you will not betray me?"

"No, a thousand times no, for why bring sorrow upon them?"

"I will trust you, captain. My parents live in the town of G—, in Massachusetts, and my brother's name is the Reverend Manton Mordecai."

"In G—? Do you know there an old sea-captain, one Rufus Sprague?"

"As a boy I knew him, sir; but I have been long years from home."

The buccaneer chief was silent for a few moments, as though in deep meditation.

"I will obey your bidding, Mordecai, and I will not betray your evil career to those who love you."

"Now take your leap from this cliff into eternity, for your last moment of life has come!" commanded the Red Sea-Raider.

Mordecai turned, saluted the buccaneer chief, and then sprung from the cliff without a word, going down like an arrow into the depths below!

CHAPTER XXV.

BEATEN OFF.

THE plunge of Mark Mordecai, the pirate sailor, into the waters of the basin was heard by the buccaneer chief, who stepped to the very edge of the cliff and coolly gazed down into the darkness.

The white spray was seen for an instant, and then he could see no more.

If the man was killed by the fall, or if he arose unhurt and swam away he could not tell.

The chances were ninety-nine to one that the pirate sailor had taken his death leap, and was then at the bottom of the basin.

Returning to the sea cliff, Brazos the Buccaneer again swept the seas for the strange vessel.

She could be indistinctly seen afar off, but coming slowly along the coast toward the basin.

"I shall go and prepare for her," he said, quietly, and descending to the shore he hailed for a boat to be sent for him, and was soon on board the schooner.

"Send a boat with muffled oars, send Moralez out to the entrance to the basin, and let them keep watch for a coming vessel, or boats."

"As soon as they discover either, let them report."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Moralez, and the boat was sent with an under officer in charge.

"All is ready, Senior Captain," said Officer Moralez, soon after, entering the cabin whither Brazos the Buccaneer had gone.

"I do not wish the heavy guns used unless it is necessary, for they can be heard a long way off, and I desire to remain here until our vessel is in perfect ship-shape, Senior Moralez."

"Yes, sir, and a couple of days more will have her so."

"Yes, and if our heavy guns are heard they may bring a cruiser down upon us."

"Small arms must beat them off, Senior Moralez."

"Yes, Captain Brazos; but had you any inkling of an attack?"

"Only my suspicious nature, Moralez."

"I did not believe Mordecai's story about the death of Rodriguez, so I watched for developments, and a visit to the cliff showed me an unarmed vessel approaching, her decks crowded with men."

"I called to Mordecai to fetch my glass, watched his face as I talked to him, saw guilt stamped thereon, so sent him to his death."

"And rightly, senior, for living the lives we do we cannot be too careful in looking out for traitors; but I would never have suspected Rodriguez, as he seemed a very fine fellow."

"He was, and, I am sure, came aboard this vessel for other purpose than to turn pirate."

"Now we will go on deck and bide our time."

Upon reaching the deck, Captain Brazos went to every man and gave him orders as to what he was to do, after which he returned to his cabin to await the return of the boat with news.

The men all had muskets, with which they were to open fire when the order to do so was given, and then they were armed with three pistols each and a cutlass.

"They must never board us," said Captain Brazos, firmly.

He was quietly reading in his cabin, when Officer Moralez called to him to come on deck.

"The boat is returning, Senior Captain," said the pirate lieutenant, as Brazos went on deck and joined him.

The boat was seen coming toward the schooner, but her oars being muffled, there was no sound to greet the ear.

In a moment more a young man sprung on deck and approached Brazos, whom he saluted politely.

"There is a brig in the offing, sir, and she has anchored, while there are a number of boats, filled with men, coming toward the basin," he said.

"It is as I thought."

"Get your boat up to the davits, Senior Roe, and take your post of duty," was the quiet reply of Captain Brazos, whom nothing seemed to ruffle.

In a few moments dark objects were seen entering the basin.

They came noiselessly on, and straight toward the schooner they headed.

But one light was visible upon the schooner, and that a dim one, and no one would suspect that three-score-and-ten pirates lay upon their arms, their glittering eyes turned upon their

foes and weapons grasped ready to deal death, on that silent vessel.

Nearer and nearer came the boats, until suddenly the stern voice of Brazos the Buccaneer gave the word to fire.

The boats were almost upon the schooner, and the pirates were growing very uneasy at the close proximity of their foes.

"Fire!"

With the command sixty muskets flashed forth, and then it was that those who had come to surprise were surprised themselves.

Then it was that the brave crew who followed Basil Brent were panic-stricken, and the dead and dying in the boats rendered those unhurt wild with fear of a like fate.

In vain was it that the gallant lieutenant urged on his men, that he gained the deck of the pirate schooner, with the pilot, Rodriguez at his side, and a few others of his men upon his heels.

He was surrounded by foes, wounded severely and fell to the deck just as his men sprung back into their boat and the entire flotilla fled in dismay.

But though the attacking force had been beaten off, and were rowing rapidly away under a scattering fire, Brazos the Buccaneer had fallen upon his own deck.

A bullet had glanced upon his head and felled him as though it had pierced his brain.

But Brazos the Buccaneer was not an easy man to kill, and excepting a gash through the scalp the bullet had done him no harm, though for a few moments he was insensible.

Officer Morales had sprung to his side and was bending over him when Captain Brazos raised his hand to his head, passed it several times across his forehead and then opened his eyes.

The light of the battle-lantern just brought flashed full in his face and the chief sat up.

His head hurt him and he ran his fingers over the wound.

"A close call, Morales," he said.

"Yes, senor; you fell like a dead man."

"The boats were beaten off?"

"Yes, senor."

"Ah! who have we here?"

The eyes of Brazos rested upon the form of Basil Brent as he spoke.

"The daring leader of the enemy, sir."

"He gained our decks with half a dozen of his men, and one of them it was who shot you."

"He fell, and there lie two of his men stone dead, but the others sprung back into their boats and escaped, for I did not pursue them."

"You are right, Morales."

"That man wears a naval officer's uniform."

"Is he dead?"

"Yes, senor, without doubt."

"Turn him over and let me see his face."

The officer obeyed, and a battle-lantern was flashed in the face of Basil Brent.

"By Heaven! I know that face."

"It is one I can never forget," cried Brazos the Buccaneer, and kneeling by the side of Basil Brent he placed his hand upon his heart.

"Morales, he is not dead."

"He lives, and his life must be saved."

"Carry him into my cabin and send the surgeon at once to me there!"

"This man must not die," and Brazos the Buccaneer seemed more excited than his crew had ever before known him to be.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CAPTAIN BRAZOS IN A RAGE.

"WHICH way, senor, shall I head?"

So asked Officer Morales several days after the attack upon the Sea-Raider by the flotilla of boats under Basil Brent, as the schooner headed out of the basin where she had been so long hiding away.

It was nearly sunset, and the light falling upon the graceful craft, showed that she had been put in perfect trim.

She no longer sailed loggy, and her hull was painted scarlet, as were also her masts, and spars, relieved only by black lines from bow to stern and on the end of the spars.

Her sails were new, her guntackle had been wholly replaced, and her deck, seamed by many a shot-mark, had been made smooth and white.

Under a light breeze she sped along in a manner that charmed her captain and crew, causing Brazos the Buccaneer to say:

"She seems like her old self once more, Morales."

"She does indeed, senor; but I hope we will be able to get the brig for all that, as no vessel afloat would I fear on that craft."

"You are right, and we will get her, for even now she belongs to me; but, to answer your question as to how you shall head I will say run along the coast toward Boston and find another safe hiding-place, as I will have to visit the city for a few days."

"You run a fearful risk in doing so, Captain Brazos," said Morales, who was really attached to his chief.

"I run a risk at sea, in fact anywhere; but I must go, Morales, for there is work for me to do there."

"We can find a retreat somewhere, sir, and

I'll talk with the men and see if they know of any."

"Do so."

The result of questioning the men revealed the fact that there was one who knew the coast thoroughly from the Kennebec to Montauk Point, having been a coaster before he turned pirate, and he readily directed the Buccaneer where to find a safe hiding-place.

"It's a safe harbor, sir, where nothing ever goes except a coaster now and then to hunt a refuge from a storm, and by housing topmasts the schooner can hide snugly and not be seen from any passing vessel," said the man, who had given up an honest life to turn pirate and lived to regret it many times over.

"All right, my man, act as pilot and you shall be well rewarded."

"But can I readily get to Boston from there?"

"By boat, sir."

"How could I go by boat?"

"Take one of the schooner's boats, sir, and row there, for it is a matter of not many leagues."

"I will only take my servant, Jet, so could I go by land?"

"Yes, sir, you could walk to a village two leagues inland and get conveyance; but it would be risky as they might wish to know something about you that you could not tell."

"True, my man."

"I'll take the gig and Jet only need go with me."

"Have the boat rigged with a sail, water-cask and a few days provisions, Senor Morales," and while the schooner was put away for the hiding-place, under the coaster as pilot, Captain Brazos went into his cabin and told his negro servant, who was valet, cook and steward for his master, to get ready to accompany him to Boston.

The place in which the coaster ran the schooner was certainly a snug retreat, a little harborage locked in by high hills, and where to-day stands a pretty town, but then was a lonely spot.

The topmasts were housed, the anchor let fall, a lookout was placed upon a high hill commanding a view seaward and landward, and not even a huntsman could approach the shore of the harbor without being seen a long way off before he could discover a vessel at anchor there.

Seaward a grand view was had, so that a craft coming up or down the coast, or shoreward, could be sighted leagues away, giving the schooner a chance to escape should a cruiser appear.

Feeling confident that his vessel was snugly hidden, and with perfect confidence in Morales, Captain Brazos set sail just after dark in the gig for Boston.

The little craft had been fitted with a leg-of-mutton sail and jib, and had several days' water and provisions on board, though the buccaneer knew that he should reach port with a fair breeze in seven or eight hours.

But then Captain Brazos was a man to prepare against emergencies, and he went well-furnished and also well-armed.

Jet was his only companion, to the great delight of the negro, who was glad to get a chance to visit the city again, where he had enjoyed himself on several occasions before.

If the truth must be told, Jet preferred city life to piracy; but then he was devoted to his master, would die to save him from death if need be, and so was not one to desert him, be his life what it might.

The wind was fair, the gig sailed well, and following the coast the little craft went so swiftly along that the Boston Light came in sight several hours after leaving the schooner.

Holding on his course, it was just dawn when Brazos, the Buccaneer, ran into a wharf which he knew well, for, while pretending to be Captain Conrad, a Southern planter, he had often enjoyed a sail on Boston Bay in a pleasure-boat, and thus learned the waters well, so that in case of necessity he could be his own pilot.

This knowledge now served him well, and giving an early market-wagon his traps from the boat to carry to his home, he started for the abode with Jet, which we have seen Rafael Rodriguez enter several days before and make himself so thoroughly at home in.

His keys admitted him to the house and to his rooms, and telling Jet to let Phillis know of his return and not to have breakfast before noon, as he was much fatigued, he retired to rest in his comfortable bed, little dreaming of the occupant which it had held three nights before him.

Promptly at noon breakfast was served and when "Captain Conrad," as Phillis knew him, sat down to enjoy the meal he learned something from the negress while seemed to take away his appetite, for he arose from the table and began to pace the room, which now and then bitter oaths broke from his lips which sent the woman flying from his presence in terror, for, never before had she seen her master in such a rage, and the glitter in his eyes caused her to fear that he had gone mad.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A SURPRISE.

At last Captain Conrad, as I shall call him

while he is assuming to be such, stopped in his quick walk and said sharply:

"Jet, send that frightened fool here to me."

"Yes, massa," and Jet sought Phillis in her culinary domain.

Phillis was walking the floor too.

She was swinging her hand and presented a picture of despair when Jet entered the kitchen.

"Is he still mad, Jet, honey, and will he kill me?" she asked, hastily, looking as though she expected to hear her death sentence.

"No, Phillis, massa hain't gwine ter hurt yer; but he's mad at what yer tole him had been did here in his absence; but it hain't with you."

"Lordy! I thought it were all right, Jet, I did, 'fore de Lord, chile."

"I knows dot, Phillis; but come, massa wants ter talk with yer."

"Is he goin' ter kill me, yer reckon?"

"No, indeed, fer he hain't mad wid you, woman."

"But his eyes blazed like fire at me."

"Does you think he'll spar' me?"

"Yes, ob course he will."

"Waal, Jet, jist wait until I says a leetle prayer to the Goo' Lordy ter take keer o' me in de den o' de lion, for dat man do hab a powerful lionish look in he eyes."

"Tell him I'se a-comin', Jet, soon as I gits a apron on; but it hain't a apron I is arter, but prayer, prayer."

"Now, go, Jet, while I slumps down on my knees an' prays?"

"Better say yer Amen quick, Phillis, for massa don't like ter be kept waitin'."

"Maybe I better pray arter I gits back—if I gits back ter pray!" she added dubiously.

"Yas, come along now—Yas, sah, we is coming," called out Jet, as he heard his master's vehement call, and old Phillis fairly shot into the dining-room with a face that was so scared that Captain Conrad saw he could get nothing intelligible from her unless he calmed her fears first.

So he said:

"Come, Phillis, my good woman, I am not angry with you, so don't be frightened, but tell me all you can."

"Sit down, first, for you are trembling like a child, and Jet, give her a glass of brandy to steady her."

Under the kindly tone of the buccaneer and the brandy given her by Jet, Phillis calmed her fears and said:

"Massa, I wants ter tell yer de Bible truf, sah, about it all, and jist lem'e gib yer de gold dat he done gib to me, sah," and Phillis laid the money upon the table.

"I do not want the money, Phillis; but I do wish you to tell me all that you know about this strange visitor, his coming, his stay here, and his going."

"Well, sah, massa, I were a leetle surprised to hear my bell ring, 'cause I wasn't 'spectin' you back as you knows, sah."

"I found a sailor gemman here, sah, one as helped you, I recomembers when you moved here."

"He told me you had sent him, and he had your keys which you had give to him."

"I got supper for him, and he made himself that pleasant, I thought he were a very nice gemman."

"Waal, sah, he put on some o' your clothes ther next day, and looked that fine, I seen he wasn't no poor trash."

"He jist made himself at home, sah, and I did all I could for him, thinking you had sent him as he said you had."

"He looked all over the rooms, sah, axed me about what was ter be done with your things ef you was ter die, and I tole him Jet was ter come about 'em, but ef Jet didn't come, arter ther year were gone, I was ter take a letter you had writ to Lawyer Allen."

"Arter two days, massa, de gemman had a trunk and some packages come here for him, and then he drove off in a carriage and I hain't see him no more."

"You told me at first that he was a foreign-looking man, dressed in sailor garb?"

"Yas, massa, so he was."

"He spoke with an accent?"

"Yas, massa."

"Had a handsome face, wearing full beard?"

"Yas, sah, when he fu'st come; but he shaved off his whiskers while he were here."

"Ah!"

"Yas, sah."

"About how old was he?"

"About de same age as you is, massa," replied Phillis, not caring to guess at a venture, for she was a woman, and though a negress, sensitive about the numbers she had put behind her.

"A man of forty perhaps?"

"Yas, sah."

"You do not know where he went?"

"No, sah."

"He had a trunk and some things brought here?"

"Yas, sah."

"And drove off in a carriage?"

"Yas, sah, and I recomembers it was de same driver as you has sometimes had drive

you, for I seen him when he comed up after de trunk."

"I see, from the School street stables?"

"Yes, sah."

"Jet?"

"Yas, massa."

"Go to the stables on School street and find out who drove a carriage that called here for a man and trunk several days ago."

"Yas, sah."

"Ask the driver where he took the party, and if it was to a vessel about to sail, a stage-office or hotel, find out what name was put down by the man."

"Yas, massa."

"And Jet!"

"Yas, sah."

"Take a carriage yourself so that you need lose no time, and get the same driver to go with you."

"Yas, massa," and Jet disappeared.

Then Captain Conrad turned again to Phillis and questioned her again upon the stranger's coming, his appearance, and in all details that might help him.

When he had dismissed her he muttered to himself:

"She says that he was here helping me to move into these rooms, and this, with her description of him, tallies with the belief in my mind that he is none other than Rodriguez."

"Now, who is this man Rodriguez, I wonder? Let me see, I shipped him in Havana one night, and he was certainly a most able seaman."

"I have seen him somewhere before, his face fairly haunts me."

"But where?"

"Why does he dog my steps?"

"I can understand his leading a force against me, as I am sure that he did lead those who attacked my schooner in the boats the other night."

"But why did he come here?"

"Why did he play the role of my friend here in my rooms, leaving all as he found it on his departure?"

"But has he left all as he found it?"

And the man who sat musing in his chair sprung to his feet.

He first stepped to the mantle and took up the letter which he had left for Lawyer Allen, and which Phillis was to give to him did aught happen to him and he not return when the year had passed.

"Ha! I sealed this with this ring upon my finger, and it now bears the seal left in my desk."

"It has been opened and read, then resealed."

"But how did he get into my desk?"

"If he had keys to my rooms, he could get keys for my desk."

"Yes, by Heaven! and my strong box too!"

With a savage oath the man ran to his desk, and taking a bunch of keys from his pocket hastily opened it.

"Yes, it has been opened, and—ha! those papers are gone!"

"What does this mean?"

He was white with rage now, and stood a moment as though almost overcome with the flood of emotions surging upon him.

Then he sprung to the closet and opened his strong box.

He gave a sigh of relief as he found the treasure was there; but in going over it uttered a cry like a wild beast as he missed the necklace locket with miniature and the ruby ring.

"In the name of Satan, who is this man?" he shouted so loud that Phillis came running into the room:

"Did you call, massa?"

"Go to the devil!"

"Yas, sah," and Phillis flew back to the kitchen ashen in hue with fright.

"He clean gone mad; but if he come in here arter me I scalds him," she muttered, taking her stand by the fireplace and throwing more wood on under the pot of boiling water to get up a more intense heat, while she seized a gourd in her hand ready to carry out her design.

It was lucky for Captain Conrad that he did not follow Phillis to the kitchen to ask questions, for the negress was at bay in her fright, and would have carried out her threat.

Just then Jet returned, and in answer to the quick query of his master as to whether he had made any discovery, replied:

"Yas, massa, he took de stage for G—, sah, and his name on de books was Rafael Rodriguez."

"By the Lord Harry! it is as I thought."

"And who, in the name of all the saints, is Rafael Rodriguez but that seaman Rodriguez, and who is he?"

"I did right to make Mordecai spring over the cliff."

"Now to solve this mystery to my liking."

And half an hour after Captain Conrad was on his way to G— by private conveyance, for the stage was not to leave until the following day.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CAPTAIN CONRAD VISITS G—.

THERE was another stranger at the Pot Luck Inn, in the little coast town of G—, and like

his predecessor, he made the heart of Host Berry glad, for he spent his money freely.

He had arrived by private conveyance, and was accompanied by his negro slave, while his horses and carriage were of the best, and the coachman seemed to feel the importance of having brought a distinguished personage to visit a small village.

Upon his arrival at the Pot Luck Inn, the visitor had given his name as Captain Conrad, a Southern planter.

At that time a man from the far South, who came from the Gulf shores and was a planter of cotton and sugar-cane, was considered of vast importance, and so Captain Conrad was regarded with a respect amounting almost to adoration.

He asked for the best rooms, said that he wanted the best stalls for his horses and good quarters for his coachman, while his black valet must have a room near his own.

He wanted the best the house could afford in the epicurean line, and called for the oldest and rarest wines.

Host Berry was in his element, and carried a bottle of wine and silver goblet, on a silver salver, himself to the distinguished guest.

"Sit down landlord, and have a glass with me."

Host Berry bent low at the honor and dropped into a seat.

"I am from the far south, a planter, and ran down to your pretty village for a few days' recreation."

"Yes, sir," and Host Berry regretted that there was not some title, like "my lord," "your highness" and of that ilk that he could call a Southern planter from the shores of the Gulf of Mexico.

"I have been a sailor, so like the sea-shore, and was glad to find that a mission I had to perform brought me to the coast."

"Yes, sir."

"You have a fine tavern here, host."

"Yes, sir, excellent indeed," and the landlord began to feel more at home when his hotel was the subject of conversation.

"Lived here long?"

"Born here, sir, and my father before me."

"Always kept a good house, sir, for it runs in our family to keep tavern."

"You know the people pretty well?"

"Every man, woman and child, sir."

"Do you know an old gentleman here by the name of Mordecai?"

"Indeed I do, sir, and once Mark Mordecai was a rich ship-owner."

"But he lost his wealth by ill-fortune, and is now a poor man, for he, his wife and pretty daughter Celine, are all dependent upon the salary of the young parson, the son of the old cripple, and a fine fellow he is though his brother went to the bad."

"They are poor then?"

"Very poor, sir, for the salary of the young dominie is not much, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"Miss Celine does all she can to help, for she is housekeeper and has a few pupils that give her a little spending money."

"And the son that went to the bad as you say?"

"His name was Mark and he was a wild one."

"He would not study, pounded the school-master nearly to death and ran off to sea."

"Since then they have not heard of him, and our lads think he took to pirating; but then I don't think he was as bad as that for at heart he was a good fellow."

"Do you know the Mordecais, Captain Conrad?"

"Well no, but I have known their son, and, as you say he was not a bad fellow, and I will call upon his parents to prove that much, for he has left them a snug little fortune."

"He is dead then, poor Mark?"

"Yes, we had some dealings together, in fact he was skipper of one of my vessels, for I am a ship-owner too, and left in my hands some money for his parents, and, as he was lost at sea I will give it to them."

"But do not speak of this, landlord."

"Oh, no, sir! a landlord of an inn who tells tales loses his customers very soon, I can tell you."

"I never talk."

"You are right; but I found in my room here a letter addressed to Don Rafael Rodriguez."

"Yes, sir."

"Who was he?"

"A Cuban gentleman, sir, who has just left, I may say, and such a rich man."

"He came down here for a few days and had these rooms, and this was his favorite wine, while, like you, sir, he always got me to help him drink a bottle."

"And so brave, sir, was he, for he went by night to the cemetery."

"Is there anything remarkable in that?"

"Indeed, there is, sir."

"And what is there courageous in visiting a cemetery by night?"

"Our graveyard, sir."

"Is your graveyard different from others?"

"Yes, sir."

"In what respect pray?"

"Belmont the Buccaneer is buried there," whispered the landlord.

In spite of his always calm mien Captain Conrad half-sprung to his feet, upsetting the bottle of wine and glasses.

"Oh, sir! the wine!"

"Confound the wine! bring another bottle, or rather send for it; but you startled me by mentioning the name of that fearful man," and Captain Conrad calmly resumed his seat, though it was evident that the name of Belmont the Buccaneer had caused him a greater start than he cared for the landlord to see.

The host ran for another bottle, while Captain Conrad asked in an indifferent tone:

"So that inhuman pirate is buried here, is he?"

"In our graveyard, sir."

"Where did he die?"

"Here, sir."

"When?"

"About sixteen years ago, or thereabout, sir."

"What ailed him?"

"He was hanged."

Again Captain Conrad started, but the landlord did not observe it.

"Tell me of it."

"Well, sir, you must know that Captain Sprague, whom we call commodore now, commanded a privateer in those days, and he captured this bad pirate and brought him into port."

"The pirate had fought until his men were nearly all dead, and his ship sunk, and then we, with a few others were picked up by the privateer's boats."

"The men claimed to have been captured and pressed into service by Belmont, so Captain Sprague spared them and made them ship on his vessel; but he ran into port here, where was his home, with the pirate leader hanging at the yard-arm of his brig, and he was buried over in our graveyard, and somebody, nobody knows who, went by night and put a monument, representing a stone gallows over his grave."

"By Heaven! but who did this?" hotly said Captain Conrad.

"Nobody knows, sir, but it is there to-day, and it is said to see the grave of Belmont the Buccaneer by night brings ill-omen to those who do so, and yet Don Rafael Rodriguez went there by night."

"He must be a brave man."

"He is, sir."

"And where is Captain Sprague?"

"We call him commodore now, sir."

"Well, he is here?"

"Yes, sir."

"I will call upon him while here, for I have a desire to see the man that hanged Belmont the Buccaneer."

"But don't go to the gallows grave by night, sir."

"Like your friend the Don I have no fear; but I shall go by daylight, as I can see it better."

"Now let me have dinner and then direct me where to find the home of the Reverend Manton Mordecai."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A PIRATE'S HONOR.

THE Reverend Manton Mordecai was a wholly good man.

His brother had been a wild, reckless fellow, and had never brought a dollar to the support of his aged parents, since the failure of their father, who had, as has been said, once been well off.

Manton Mordecai had accepted a good education from his father, where his brother had refused to study, and the former, seeing Mark's evil course, had leant toward a life of goodness and became a minister.

He was not a brilliant man, so was content to accept an humble charge with a few hundreds a year.

The church gave the young rector a parsonage to live in, and it had some twenty acres adjoining, which the parson tilled.

He had purchased a horse and wagon, a couple of cows, and some chickens and turkeys, while there was an abundance of fruit upon the place, so that they lived in comfort at least.

Celine put up preserves, took care of the house and milked the cows, the parson did the gardening, kept the place in order, and cared for the horse, cows, pigs and poultry, while his parents, growing old, put their hands to anything that they could help their children in.

An occasional marriage helped out the parson's meager salary; but he felt himself too poor to marry a lovely girl whom he devotedly loved, yet who was as poor as he was, and this was one of the crosses which he had to bear through life.

"One mouth more to feed, one form more

to clothe would cramp us very much, so I will release Myrtle of her engagement to me and let her marry some worthy young man who can take good care of her."

So said the parson, and he was as good as his word, while Myrtle Moore said:

"I shall never marry another man, Manton, and if some day you get a rich parish and still love me, come after me."

Celine Mordecai was a girl among a thousand, for she was beautiful in face and form, possessed a lovely character, made all of the clothes for the family, as well as herself, and was a perfect housekeeper. And yet Celine found time to cultivate her flowers, teach several little children and enjoy a long walk every day, for exercise, she said, as though she did not get more than enough exercise in the duties devolving upon her.

She was ever happy when with her brother and parents, though at times when alone very sad, for Mark Mordecai had been her favorite brother and his unknown fate often worried her.

Still she hoped that he would some day come back, and if so had hopes of him.

So matters stood at Mordecai Parsonage when the buccaneer, impersonating Captain Conrad, a planter, appeared in G—.

Having been told where to find the parsonage, which was not very far from the church, Captain Conrad made his way thither.

It was growing late in the afternoon when he drew near the gate, and halting he saw the fair form of Celine bending over her flowers.

His touch on the latch caused her to look up, and she arose as she saw the stranger, while the rich color came into her face.

"A beauty, certainly," muttered Captain Conrad, and he raised his hat as he asked:

"May I inquire, miss, if this is the home of the Reverend Manton Mordecai?"

"It is, sir; will you walk in, though my brother is not at home?"

"Thank you; this then is Miss Celine Mordecai?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have often heard your brother speak of you."

"You know brother Manton then?"

"No, I referred to your brother Mark."

"Ah! do you know dear Mark?"

"And do you know aught of him, sir?" and Celine came nearer the visitor.

"Yes, I knew Mark well, for he was for a long time master of one of my vessels, and I put him in a way of making a fortune, had not—"

"Your words, sir, your face tell me that my brother Mark is dead?"

"Alas! such is the case, for he was lost at sea with his vessel some months ago."

The beautiful head was bowed and the form quivered with emotion, while tears trickled across the cheeks.

"Miss Mordecai, it was to tell you of your brother that I came here; but I expected to have seen your brother the clergyman."

"As I have met you, let me tell you what I have to say of Mark, and make known that he has left a snug little sum for you all."

"Oh sir! I would give a fortune to have poor Mark again."

"But I am forgetting the courtesy due you, so now ask you to come into the house."

"And your parents?"

"Are in their favorite seats on the little piazza overlooking the sea, and I verily believe they sit there watching for some incoming vessel to bring back poor brother Mark."

"I will tell them, sir, that you are here and have news of Mark, but you must break the news that he has passed away."

"But you have not told me your name, sir?" she added as they started toward the house together, and the brave girl tried hard to bear up under sorrow.

"My name is Carl Conrad, and I am known as Captain Conrad, and come from Louisiana where I have a plantation."

"Your brother Mark was master of one of my vessels, for I also have a few coasting craft, and I was deeply attached to him."

"Now, Miss Mordecai, you know all that I can tell you of myself."

Celine bowed and was leading the way to the pretty little house, when suddenly her brother drove up, and they awaited his coming.

He was a pleasant-faced man, not brilliant,

but good, and at the introduction of his sister shook hands warmly with the visitor.

"I am glad to welcome you, Captain Conrad."

"I saw Landlord Berry and he told me he had just directed a visitor to my house."

"But, Celine, what ails you, for you are as pale as a ghost?" and the young clergyman seemed anxious about his sister, while Captain Conrad said:

"I have just told her some bad news, sir, for I have brought news of your brother Mark's death, he having been lost at sea in one of my vessels which he commanded."

"Heaven's will be done, though it is for us to mourn his loss," said Manton Mordecai with devout resignation.

Then Captain Conrad made known that Mark Mordecai had lived a steady life, invested his earnings and left the sum of fifteen thousand dollars to his parents and sister, to be equally divided, and to be put to what use they deemed best.

"He left such instructions with me, Mr. Mordecai, adding that as you had a calling, and the money would support those depending upon you, it would relieve you of all care," said Captain Conrad, and then he added:

"If you will come to my hotel I will give you a draft for the full amount, on a Boston bank, and, as it will be a consolation to your parents and yourself to know, permit me to tell you that your brother had reformed, was sorry for his past, and was a noble fellow."

"I will be glad to see you, Mr. Mordecai, at any time at the hotel, but now I will leave you to make known to your parents the sad news I am the bearer of," and declining to stay longer Captain Conrad took his departure, wending his steps toward the cemetery surrounding the church which the Reverend Mordecai was rector of.

As he passed along he mused:

"The beauty of that girl, and her grief, made me nearly double the amount left by Mordecai."

"So be it, I have done a good act and honored my word to the man I killed."

"Now to see the grave of Belmont the Buccaneer."

Five minutes after he stood by the pirate's grave, and a strange look rested upon his face as he gazed upon the ghastly monument which had been so mysteriously erected over the ashes of the dead buccaneer.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE COMMODORE'S VISITOR.

COMMODORE SPRAGUE, as I have said, had but one leg, he having lost one in a desperate combat at sea when he commanded a privateer.

The commodore had gone to sea before the mast, though his father was in good circumstances, and frugal, saving and a good sailor he had turned up at home long years after with a handsome sum of money which he invested well.

This fortune was added to by his captures at sea in his privateer, so that he was the possessor of the old homestead of Beacon Hill and a large fortune when he retired from the sea.

He had married in the West Indies and his wife was a most beautiful woman though her face was one of touching sadness.

She had not come to her husband's home until their little Norma was two years old, and soon after she died.

Some said she looked like a woman with a broken heart, though she was a true and affectionate wife to the sea-captain.

When Norma was ten years of age the commodore gave up the sea and settled down to a life of ease at Beacon Hill, seemingly happy with the love of his little daughter.

He was a stern man among men, it was said; but Norma was the very idol of his life, and he felt that he could trust her in all things.

The deep grief that had fallen upon her in the death of Basil Brent, caused him to feel keenly for her, and he did all in his power to cheer her up, and she tried hard to banish her sorrows for his sake.

When he had been told by Norma about the locket and ring, and recognized in the former his dead wife's picture, he was startled; but how to account for its being in the possession of a stranger, and who that stranger was he could not tell.

The fact that a stranger, calling himself Don Rafael, had met Norma in the graveyard and given to her a miniature of her mother worried him, and for days he seemed to fret under the unsolved mystery, and his daughter saw that something troubled him, yet she appeared not to notice it.

One afternoon the commodore was seated alone upon his piazza, gazing as was his wont upon the sea, which had so long been his home.

Norma had gone off for a gallop on horseback through the hills, and the commodore was left to himself.

Suddenly his eyes fell upon a stranger coming along the ridge road, for he saw at a glance that it was not one of the townspeople.

The stranger halted at the gate, entered and advanced toward the mansion, while the commodore regarded him fixedly, and with a slight uneasiness, for his face changed color.

He saw a distinguished-looking personage, dressed in the extreme height of fashion, carrying a gold-headed cane, and having the air of a man of refinement.

He raised his hat politely as he advanced, and the commodore arose to receive him.

"Commodore Sprague, I presume?" said the visitor.

"Yes, sir, at your service."

"My name is Conrad, sir, and I have called to see you upon a matter of importance."

"Be seated, Mr. Conrad, or will you come into my library?"

"No, we will be free from intrusion here, I think, and the view is so grandly beautiful."

"I love the sea, Commodore Sprague, as you do."

"Yes, sir, I love the sea, but I have given up the life of a sailor, as you see I am a cripple."

"Yes, you lost your leg in a gallant action during the late war, I believe?"

"Yes, sir; but you said you had business of importance to discuss," and the commodore glanced warily at his visitor.

Somehow he did not like the man.

"Ah, yes, sir, so I have, and I will make it known at once."

"Do you know a man by the name of Rodriguez, may I ask?"

"No, sir, I do not."

"Never heard of such a man?"

"I do not recall such a name."

"Has a visitor, a stranger, called on you of late?"

"No, sir."

"There has been a stranger in your town?"

"Yes, sir, I so heard; but have not seen him."

"He was stopping at the Pot Luck Inn, where I am."

"I have not seen him."

"You have heard of his being here?"

"Yes, sir, I heard of such a person being in the village."

"Strange that you have not seen him, as his motive in coming here was to see you, I think."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is strange that he did not seek me there."

"You are certain that he did not?" and the visitor fixed his piercing eyes full upon the face of the commodore, who said hotly:

"Do I understand that you come here to insult me?"

"Far from it; but as the man to whom I refer could benefit himself by seeing you, I supposed of course that he had done so, and hence my surprise when you say that he did not."

"Well, sir, I tell you the truth."

"I believe you, Commodore Sprague; but I cannot understand why he did not."

"Pray explain more fully what you mean."

"The fact is, sir, that the man stole some valuable papers and jewelry from me, and I supposed came here to barter with you for a price for them."

"Some papers?"

"Yes, sir."

"And some jewelry?"

"Yes, sir."

The commodore looked at his visitor a moment, and the thought flashed through his mind that he could now get at a solution

of the mystery about the necklace, miniature and ring given to Norma,

So he said:

"My dear sir, your speaking of jewelry reminds me that the stranger to whom you refer met my daughter in the cemetery one afternoon, and gave to her a necklace, with a locket attached, also, a ruby ring.

"In the locket was a miniature likeness of my wife, Norma's mother, and he bade her wear it to shield her from harm.

"I was away when she returned home, and when I learned of the affair the stranger was gone.

"More I do not know."

"The locket was of massive gold, the miniature likeness one of a lovely woman, and the setting was of opals, pearls and diamonds?"

"Yes, sir."

"The chain was of heavy gold, the clasp being of clasped hands?"

"Yes, sir."

"The ring was a superb ruby?"

"It is true, sir."

"These things were stolen from me, Commodore Sprague, and I was keeping them to one day give them to your daughter; but how I was anticipated in this I do not understand, as no one knew my intention; but the papers?"

"Of any papers I know nothing."

"But your daughter may."

"If so she did not speak of them."

"It is strange that he should give her one and not the other, for the papers were of interest to her."

"And what were they?"

"Papers that were her mother's."

"And may I ask how you came by jewelry and papers of importance that belonged to my wife?"

"I got them years ago, and having at last found out where you and your daughter were, I had decided to give them to her as they were of value; but before I could do so my rooms were entered in my absence and they were stolen from me, as I have said."

"Are you a lawyer, sir?"

"I am not; I am a sailor."

"Indeed!"

"Don't I look it?"

"Hardly, in that rig," dryly said the commodore.

"Clothes do not make the man, Commodore Sprague; but may I ask you if you know one Lieutenant Basil Brent?"

"I did, sir, but he is dead."

"Indeed?"

"He was killed a short while since."

"An officer in the navy, I believe?"

"Yes, and a gallant one, and pity it is that he was wiped out by a band of cut-throat pirates."

Captain Conrad smiled, and replied:

"How was it?"

"Well, his brother, Bob Brent, a young merchant captain, got wind of a buccaneer craft in hiding on the coast of Maine, and got his brother to organize a crew to capture the pirate.

"So they went, found the outlaw prepared for them, were beaten off, and Basil Brent, who gained the enemy's deck, was killed."

"It was a sad ending for a noble officer. But his brother?"

"Bob Brent?"

"Yes, sir."

"Captain Bob deeply felt his brother's loss, especially as he had gotten him to lead it, while he was home on leave, and he has gone to sea in his brig, the Golden Hope."

"I see; but did Lieutenant Brent leave no family?"

"He was not married, and had only his brother, Captain Bob, though I am free to confess now that he was engaged to my daughter."

"Ah!" and the visitor's inflection on the word was a strange one.

"She must deeply mourn the loss of so gallant a lover."

"She does; but she is a brave girl, and accepts the situation as it is, for she told me that Basil asked her to marry Captain Bob in case he met with his death."

"Ah!" and again it was uttered with the same inflection.

"So I suppose she will marry Bob, though her heart will be in the grave with Basil."

"And Captain Bob Brent will get his brother's money?"

"Ah, yes, and the magnificent estate of Overlook, which you see yonder, but which Bob has allowed to run to ruin almost."

"I see," and the eyes of Captain Conrad were turned upon Overlook, but yet he did not seem to see the mansion, for there was a far-away look in his gaze which showed that his thoughts were occupied with something other than Overlook Manor.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A SELF-CONFESSED PIRATE.

THE commodore suddenly seemed to realize that he had become quite loquacious, and to a stranger.

He felt that he had been too communicative, and he was angry with himself for having been led on by the wary questions of his visitor to tell all that he knew.

Coming to the conclusion that he had not acted with circumspection, he asked:

"Now, sir, will you explain to me how you obtained possession of the miniature and ring of my late wife, and also of papers belonging to her, for I think an explanation is due me?"

"Well, sir, as you ask it, I will do so.

"You commanded, during the late war, an American privateer, did you not?"

"I did, sir."

"And rendered good service?"

"My Government so credited me with doing; but what has this to do with the case in point regarding that miniature?"

"Your career, sir, is mixed up in my possession of these papers and the miniature, for you attacked the pirate craft on which they were, and supposed that you had sunk her."

"I did sink the craft, sir," and the commodore moved uneasily.

"You are mistaken."

"What do you know about it, sir?"

"I will show you, sir, and think that you will agree with me that I am well-informed."

"You sighted the pirate schooner Sea Desperado one day, and gave chase."

"In fact you were looking for the craft."

"Looking for it, sir?" asked the commodore in a surprised tone.

"Yes, sir, you were in search of the Sea Desperado, and had been for some time."

"You sighted her, as I have said, gave chase, and after a running fight of forty-eight hours, in which both vessels were badly crippled, you brought her to by a shot that cut away her foremast."

"A storm threatened just at that time, and you boarded in your boats."

"The captain of the Sea Desperado was wounded, and his crew had suffered terribly, while a cry arose that the schooner was going down."

"So you gave orders to retreat to your boats and carried with you the pirate chief, Belmont the Buccaneer, along with several captives whom he had on board."

"Just as you regained your vessel the storm struck the schooner and her remaining mast went down and you believed that the pirate craft had sunk."

"In looking to the safety of your own badly-crippled vessel, you did not have a chance to keep a better watch upon the pirate vessel, and thus you did not know that she did not sink, as you and all others supposed."

"Did not sink, sir?" and the voice of Commodore Sprague was husky with emotion as he asked the question.

"No, sir, the Sea Desperado did not sink, just then at least."

"Do you know this?"

"I do."

"Who are you?"

"Captain Carlos Conrad, sir."

"That tells me nothing."

"What would you know, sir?"

"Who you are?"

"I was a lieutenant on board of the Sea Desperado."

"An officer on a pirate craft by your own confession?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you dare tell this?"

"Oh, yes."

"To me?"

"Why not?"

"You are in my power, Sir Pirate."

Captain Conrad laughed.

It was a disagreeable laugh and the commodore found that it jarred on his ears.

"You defy me?"

"Well, yes, if you so put it, for what can you do?"

"I can hang you."

"See here, Commodore Sprague, let me tell you that I do not fear you, and I ask you to let me go on with my story."

"I will hear what you have to say, sir."

"Our wreck was knocked about by the storm all night and the next day, and then was thrown upon one of the Bermuda Islands."

"Many of the crew had been killed, others wounded, and others swept into the sea, so that when we struck but a few of us escaped."

"The wreck was thrown upon a reef, and on the other side was comparatively smooth water, so we got out the long-boat, loaded it with supplies, and an iron box belonging to Captain Belmont, and managed to escape, leaving the hulk to go to pieces as we knew she would soon do."

"We reached a port among the islands and reporting ourselves as shipwrecked, no one suspected us of being Buccaneer Belmont's men and so we were kindly cared for."

"I gave up piracy and with the treasure I had in that iron box began to drift about at my own pleasure, for I learned that Belmont had died of his wounds."

"When my treasure began to run low I took to another occupation and so am pretty well provided for now; but it was from that iron chest and my desk, that necklace of your wife and the papers were stolen, and it is to find out by whom and for what purpose."

"You had kept them all that time?"

"Yes."

"And why?"

"I kept them in the chest with Captain Belmont's other treasure, which I used as my own, and I hoped some day they would come in useful."

"And now you have lost them?"

"Yes, and would know why this man Rodriguez would go to my desk and that chest, which he opened with false keys, and steal those things while he left others of far greater value."

"I can give you no clew as to his motive, sir, nor do I know who he can be."

"Nor can I fathom him."

"You may remember, as you seem to know so much, that there were several captives on the pirate schooner."

"There were several, some of whom you took on board of your vessel, and others, whom you had not time to save, who were below in irons."

"Yes, and what became of them?" asked the commodore hoarsely, and his eager manner while awaiting reply proved that the answer was one of great importance to him.

"When the schooner struck, and we escaped in the boat, we forgot them until their cries told us of their presence."

"But we dared not return to the wreck, so they were left to their fate in the hold."

"And they could not have escaped?"

"They were in double irons, in the hold and chained to the deck, so nothing but a miracle could have saved them."

"You are sure that the schooner went to pieces?"

"Yes, before we got to the island where we passed the night, for the next morning she was gone, and a heavy piece of planking came ashore and to it was still chained one of the poor wretches, showing how all had died."

The commodore gave a sigh, but it seemed more like a sigh of relief than for the fate of the captives of Belmont the Buccaneer.

"Well, sir, I am as much in the dark as you are, regarding the identity of this person who stole those things from you; but as you are a self-confessed pirate, it is my duty to denounce you and cause your arrest; so, resist at your peril," and the commodore arose quickly and drew from his breast a long-bladed, ugly-looking dagger.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN UNFORGOTTEN CRIME.

WHEN the commodore arose and stood threateningly over him with the dagger raised as though to strike, Captain Conrad did not move.

On the contrary, he laughed, and it was that same jarring laugh.

"Sit down, commodore, and don't be a fool," said Conrad, quietly.

"Sir!"

"Sit down and don't be a fool, for I am not one."

"You are to come here and tell me you are a pirate."

"No, I know to whom I confess the secret."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Simply that there is said to be honor among thieves."

"Sir!" shouted the commodore.

"Don't get excited, sir, but hear me through, and then if you wish to have me arrested, send a servant for the village constable."

There was something about the man that commanded obedience, and the old sailor obeyed.

"I am going to ask you a few questions about my old commander, Belmont the Buccaneer."

"What would you know?" sullenly asked the commodore.

"Who put that stone monument of infamy over him?"

"I do not know."

"You did not?"

"No."

"It was done by night, I learn?"

"Yes."

"No one saw it done?"

"All people shun graveyards by night."

"And yet wagons bearing that heavy mass of stone, and workmen could come to the village by night, work for hours setting it up, and not be seen?"

"It was done one stormy night, and was not brought here by wagons."

"It was landed from a float, it is thought, and then dragged up the hill on rollers to the grave."

"It must have taken a hundred men to have done what was done that night."

"I should think so; and your theory is that it was done from the sea?"

"Yes."

"And not at your command?"

"Certainly not, for why should I spend money to so mark the grave of Belmont the Buccaneer, whom I captured and hanged?"

"I can see no motive, and yet I cannot understand why any one else should do it."

"Nor I."

"Tell me how you came to hang Belmont?"

"He was a pirate."

"Was he not wounded?"

"Yes, several times, slightly: but what difference did that make?"

"You did not hang him the day you captured him?"

"No, some months after."

"Where?"

"Off this port, which I was coming to."

"You came into port with his body suspended from the yard-arm of your brig?"

"I did."

"Had you no other motive than that Captain Belmont was a pirate, for hanging him?"

The commodore started, but asked:

"Was that not motive sufficient?"

"Yes, with some."

"Then I hanged him because he was a pirate."

"You had another motive, Commodore Sprague."

Again the old sailor started, and he looked pale and worried.

"I wished to rid the sea of him."

"Did you not know him when he was a young sailor?"

"Well, I sailed before the mast in the same ship that he was in as cabin boy."

"And you were, afterward, rivals for the hand of a young lady?"

"Who says this?"

"I do."

"How do you know?"

"I was Captain Belmont's first officer."

"What has that to do with it?"

"I know much of his past life."

The commodore was silent.

It was very evident that his visitor was worrying him greatly.

"I can tell you more, sir," resumed Captain Conrad:

"You were lads together and good

friends; but you loved the same girl, and that made foes of you."

"She preferred Captain Belmont to you, and in your rage you swore revenge."

"You—"

"I will hear no more."

"You must, sir, for I wish to show you that I am not a fool to come here and place myself in your power, unless I could defend myself from you."

"You sailed again with him, he being first mate of the vessel and you second mate, another cause for your hatred of him, for you had expected the berth."

"One night, when it was blowing a gale, and the sea was running high, the first mate, Belmont, was lost overboard, as you doubtless remember."

"It was considered an accident, but it was not one, so he says."

"When you returned from your voyage, which was a long one, you found, to your amazement that Belmont had not been lost, for he was able to reach a sandy island, from whence he was taken two days after by some fishermen."

"Then he had returned home, kept the secret he held against you, and married the woman he loved."

"You found her his wife, and you quickly departed, fearing that he had told of your crime."

"Long years after you came back, for you had heard how Belmont had killed a man in a drunken broil, and fled to sea and turned pirate."

"But he had not betrayed your crime against him, you were glad to know."

"When you commanded the privateer you did not care to wholly depend upon English prizes for getting rich, so disguising your vessel at times you played free rover, and Spanish, French, and other vessels suffered at your hands."

"In fact you became a buccaneer at times, protecting yourself under the title of American privateer."

"At last the war ended and you were forced to either fly the colors of a pirate, or retire from the sea, and, wishing to do this with honor, and knowing that Belmont the Buccaneer had discovered your lawless deeds you were determined to hunt him off the face of the deep."

"You did so, thus silencing the tongue of the man who could destroy you."

"Then you gave up the sea, having lost a leg in the action with him, and came here to dwell, and no one here suspects you of being other than you have appeared to be."

"Now, my dear commodore, your crime has not been forgotten by me, you see, and so we are on partly even terms, so send a servant for the constable and arrest me as a pirate, if you wish."

"I am in your power, as you know you are in mine."

"Now tell me why you are here," was the hoarse response of the old sailor, whose face had turned to the hue of death as he heard the story of his past from another's lips.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SHOT FROM A THICKET.

IN answer to the query of Commodore Sprague, as to what he wanted of him, Captain Conrad smiled, and for a moment did not reply.

Then he said:

"I am not here to beg money of you, commodore, for I have all that I need."

"But, finding out that these things, the miniature, ring, and papers, were taken by some unknown person, I naturally looked to you as the one most interested, though how you knew that I had them in my possession I could not understand."

"I did not know it, nor did I even know of your existence."

"I can believe that now, sir, so must look elsewhere for the thief, though all I know is that he was a man who shipped with me under the name of Rodriguez, and I owe him a debt I hope some day to pay; but what his motive in robbing me, and giving the miniature and ring to your daughter I cannot understand."

"But some day I shall find out, so let us dismiss the matter when I tell you I believe you to be innocent in this, as also in having put that monument over the grave of my

old commander, whom I was very much attached to."

"Now a question."

"Well, sir?"

"What do you think of Captain Bob Brent, whom your daughter is pledged to marry?"

"He is a splendid fellow and will make her a good husband."

"I have a desire to see your daughter, and you may feel assured that it is a respectful one, so wish you to introduce me."

"Why should I?"

"I ask it, and will not forget her on her wedding-day, I promise you."

"She will have gifts enough without accepting one from a pirate," said the old sailor.

"If you are the donor of those she receives they will have been purchased with gold made by piracy," was the quick retort.

A muttered oath came from the lips of the commodore, not only at the response, but also because he saw just then Norma approaching.

She dashed rapidly into the driveway gate, and up to the door, throwing herself from the saddle before she saw that there was a stranger upon the piazza.

Her face was flushed and she looked very beautiful, in her close-fitting habit of green, and heavy waving plumes in her hat.

"My daughter, this is Captain Conrad," said her father, as she ascended the steps, leaving her horse to go to the stables alone.

"An old sailor friend of your father, Miss Sprague, whom I have not met since the time of his gallant capture of Belmont the Buccaneer."

"I am very glad to meet you," and the buccaneer bowed low, not offering his hand, which the commodore appreciated in him.

"Let us shake hands, Captain Conrad, as you are an old friend of father's, and now I recall it, I once saw you in Boston and was told that you were a Southern planter."

"I am, Miss Sprague, for my home is there, though I spend much time in Boston."

"I feel flattered to be remembered by you, I assure you."

"You are not an ordinary looking person, Captain Conrad," said Norma with a smile, and then she added:

"I heard, too, that we had a distinguished visitor at the inn; but you will remain to supper, of course, and I will run off and change my habit," and she waited for a reply.

"If your father seconds my invitation, I shall remain, for I leave town to-morrow," he said.

Thus appealed to, the commodore said quickly:

"Of course I second it, Captain Conrad, and you must stay."

But the old sailor crushed an oath between his teeth as he spoke, and wished his visitor at the bottom of the sea.

"Yes, you must stay, Captain Conrad, for I wish to know all that you can tell me about that fearful pirate, Belmont."

"You were with father, then, when he captured him?"

"I was in the combat, Miss Sprague, and served as an officer," was the prompt reply.

"Then you can tell me much which father has forgotten, I know, and, in truth, he seldom seems to care to speak of the affair; but I'll join you soon again," and Norma ran off to her room.

"There are tears in her heart for Basil Brent, though she hides them beneath smiles," muttered Captain Conrad as she disappeared.

"You have gotten up for yourself an ordeal of questioning which I hope you can get out of in safety," said the commodore pettishly, as his daughter left.

"Oh, yes, I'll not betray you, nor myself either, my dear sir; but how beautiful your daughter is, and I can see that she suffers deeply with grief for her lost lover."

"She will forget him in remembering Captain Bob."

"She is not that kind of a woman, though she may appear to do so," was the reply, and soon after they were joined by Norma and went in to supper.

It was a pleasant meal, and certainly a tempting one and well served, proving Norma an excellent housekeeper.

After it was over Norma said that she wished to have Captain Conrad tell her something of himself, for she knew that he had seen much of the world.

"Then, too, I wish to hear of Belmont the Buccaneer and of those stirring days," she said.

"I am at your service, Miss Sprague," was the smiling reply, while the commodore excused himself for a few minutes, as he said he wished to give some directions to his farm-hands who always visited him at that hour.

In Captain Conrad Norma recognized a man of the world.

"He is a man with a history," she said to herself.

He was a fascinating man to her also, for she both liked him and did not.

He was handsome, distinguished-looking and possessed most polished manners, she admitted, and he was an old friend of her father, so she was determined to be most pleasant to him.

He told her a few bogus stories of Belmont the Buccaneer, related several incidents in his own life and then sung her several Spanish songs in a voice that was melodious and winning.

When the commodore returned they were singing duets together, and soon after Captain Conrad said farewell and took his leave, declining the offer of Norma to send him to the tavern in the carriage.

It was bright starlight when he left the mansion and he walked briskly along down the ridge road, which turned into the highway leading to the village.

But just here there came a flash from the thicket and a pistol-shot rung out sharply on the night air.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN ASSASSIN'S FATE.

WHEN Commodore Sprague left the presence of his pirate guest and his daughter, it was not to see his farm-hands, as he had said, for he dismissed those who were waiting with a word.

When they were gone he went to his library and out by a side door into the flower-garden.

Along a path he went at a rapid pace for one who walked with one wooden leg, and he soon came to a gate leading out upon the ridge road.

Crossing the road, he descended a path for a hundred yards and came to a small cabin built of logs, and surrounded by a rude fence which inclosed about an acre.

The cabin was on the slope of the hill, and commanded a fine view of the village, harbor and sea.

There was a light in the humble house, and the commodore called out as he reached the gate:

"Hello!"

There answered the deep bay of a dog, and then the door opened and a man stepped out.

"Who is it?" he asked, gruffly.

"It is me, Jack Cade, so shut up your vicious brute and come here."

The dog was sent into the house, and the man, who appeared to be a rough fellow as he stood in the light from the cabin door, walked out to the gate and joined the commodore.

"It's you, commodore?" he said.

"Yes, Jack, and I want you."

"What's up?"

"Since you came here years ago and recognized me as your old commander, I have taken good care of you, haven't I?"

"Yes, you had to, for fear I'd open fire on you; but you has give me plenty of spendin' money and this home, so I is content."

"Don't you wish to make more money?"

"I does."

"It's worth a thousand to you."

"I'm your man, commodore."

"There is no risk in it."

"I hain't scary; but is it to cut a life-cable?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"A stranger."

"Where is he?"

"At my house."

"When is it to be done?"

"To night."

"When and where?"

"He will start for the village, for he is

stepping at the Pot Luck Inn, so you lie in wait at the turn of the road, in the pine thicket, and shoot him as he comes along."

"Better knife him."

"He is not one to handle easily, so shoot him."

"All right."

"But pistols makes a racket."

"No one will be within a quarter of a mile of you."

"Shoot him."

"All right, sir."

"Rob him, hide the things you get, excepting his money and jewelry, which you can have, and come back to your cabin and play sick, and I will say that I saw you sick abed this afternoon, if any suspicion falls upon you."

"All right, commodore, I'll do the job, and guess I won't be found out; but if I am, and they want to strangle me, I know you won't let me hang."

"No, Jack, I'll take care of you; but now I must be off, and you get to your ambush at once."

"I'll git there, commodore, and you had better call on a sick man to-morrow and fetch along that thousand dollars you promised me for the job."

"I'll come, Jack," and the commodore hastened back to Beacon Hill, having plotted with the man who had met and recognized him in the town one day, and knew him, as he was to put an end to the life of the visitor, whom he had now begun to fear.

After the departure of the guest, who was so unwelcome to the commodore, Norma said a few words about finding him very charming, and then kissing her father good-night, she retired to her room.

But the commodore did not retire, for he lighted a cigar and walked out upon the piazza, as was his wont before going to bed, in good or bad weather, for he could not get over his old ship habits, he said.

Hardly had he closed the door when he heard a shot in the distance, followed almost instantly by another.

"Jack has got him, and to be sure of his work he fired both pistols."

"Now I can rest easy for with that man living I could not."

"Then Jack must be looked to, for he could tell tales, and of late I have thought he was a trifle ugly in his manner toward me."

But Commodore Sprague was not correct in his saying that "Jack has got him."

Captain Conrad was a suspicious man, and when the commodore left the room he had his suspicions aroused.

He knew that he would be glad to get him out of the way.

Although attending politely to what Norma was saying, he heard the commodore dismiss the farm-hands and then go to his library.

He heard a door unlocked, opened and shut, and it was a long time before he again heard it open and close.

Then the commodore came in and the buccaneer noticed that there was mud upon his wooden stump and shoe.

He had been out, he was sure.

So when he left the house he was upon his guard, for the commodore had not urged his riding to the tavern as Norma had.

He drew a pistol from his pocket and went cautiously along, his eye upon the road and any place where there was a good ambush.

As he drew near the thicket something told him that that was the very place for an assassin, and impelled by an impulse which he could not resist, he raised his pistol and drew trigger.

Just as he did so Jack Cade had a deadly aim upon him.

But the shot of Captain Conrad saved his life, for his bullet went true, causing the explosion of Jack Cade's pistol by the shock and the ball went over his head.

It had been a random shot, on an impulse born of fear and suspicion; but it had done its work, for Captain Conrad heard his intended assassin give a cry of pain and fall heavily.

Instantly he was by his side and had dragged the man out of the thicket.

"You have killed me, curse you!" groaned Jack Cade.

"I have merely done for you what you intended to do for me, fellow."

"But who are you?"

"Jack Cade."

"That tells me nothing."

"Run for a doctor—go to old Sprague's house and have him send his carriage after Doctor Deems."

"No, I am something of a surgeon myself, and I know that none could do you any good, for that bullet went into your body, I see, not far from the heart."

"Oh Lord ha' mercy upon me!" groaned the man.

"Confess first and pray afterward."

"Tell me if Sprague did not set you upon me?"

"Yes."

"All right; you nearly won your money from him."

"Let me feel your pulse."

The man could not raise his hand, so Captain Conrad placed his fingers upon his pulse.

Then he laid his hand over his heart and said:

"The wound is fatal."

"You have not half an hour to live."

"Good-night, my man."

Then the outlaw coolly arose from his stooping position, and walked on his way.

The dying man called to him in a tone of horror, but he heeded it not, while the exertion of trying to rise and call out caused him to fall back, and after a few convulsive movements to die.

Calmly Captain Conrad went upon his way, and upon reaching the tavern, said to his obsequious host:

"A couple of bottles of that rare old wine, landlord, send to my room, and don't forget to come and help me drink them."

"I thank you, sir; I will come."

"But I was getting anxious at your long stay."

"Ah! that reminds me that on my way here from Beacon Hill, where I have passed the evening, a footpad fired upon me and demanded my purse."

"I returned his fire, and if your officers of the law will go up to where the highway and ridge road meet, they will find the fellow."

"Dead, sir?" asked the landlord, in a tone of horror, while all the loafers in the tap-room crowded about the stranger, who had suddenly become a hero.

"Landlord, give these gentlemen drinks and cigars at my expense, and don't forget to send the wine to my room."

"Good-night, gentlemen," and the pirate bowed politely and left the tap-room, while, after getting their drinks and cigars, the crowd made a rush for the scene of the tragedy.

Half an hour after Landlord Berry entered his guest's room, and said:

"It was Jack Cade, sir, a reckless sort of a fellow, and a sailor, whom no one knew anything about, but all predicted that he would come to a bad end."

"He was stone dead, sir, when we found him."

"Oh, yes, for my aim is sure."

"Fill up your glass, landlord, and then I'll ask you to make out your bill to-morrow, for I shall leave you."

"So soon, sir?" said Host Berry, regretfully.

"Yes, for I find by consulting my notebook that I had forgotten an important engagement in Boston, and I must keep it."

"To-morrow I will give my report in of the killing of that footpad."

"Remember, Jet, we leave to-morrow," and soon after Captain Conrad retired to bed and slept soundly.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A MYSTERY.

CAPTAIN CONRAD appeared the next morning before the village coroner, and gave his report of the killing of Jack Cade.

Of course he told a story to suit himself, and there was no one to contradict.

Commodore Sprague, while at breakfast the next morning, had received a note which Jet had carried to Beacon Hill.

It was as follows:

"DEAR COMMODORE:—A footpad fired upon me last night after I left your house, but his aim was not so true as mine."

"I reported him to the authorities as dead, so have to appear before a coroner this morning, and will be glad if you can come down."

"My remembrances to Miss Sprague."

"Yours, CONRAD."

The commodore did not touch a morsel to eat after receiving this letter.

He handed it over to Norma to read while he should collect his thoughts.

"The accursed fool failed, and I am glad that fellow killed him."

"One out of the way at least."

So he said to himself; but aloud he remarked:

"This is an unfortunate affair, my child, and I must go at once."

Norma thought it most unfortunate indeed, but said:

"How cool he is about it, father."

"Ah, yes, he's a cool one," and with this the commodore left the breakfast-room, and soon after drove away in his carriage.

Of course he felt that Captain Conrad had killed the man at once, and deemed this lucky, for dead men told no tales, he thought.

So he was taken aback wholly, when Captain Conrad said, after greeting him pleasantly:

"You failed that time, commodore, and I advise you not to try it again, for I mean you no harm."

The commodore was nervous, and Captain Conrad rose in his estimation, and he was glad to introduce him to the coroner as "an old friend of his of long standing."

The character of Jack Cade as a "bad 'un" helped the affair greatly, and the distinguished-looking stranger was at once acquitted as having acted wholly in self-defense.

He ordered the body buried at his expense, treated the coroner, his jury and their friends to wine, and drove away from G—a hero.

After a few weeks passed in Boston he returned with Jet in the little gig to his schooner, and upon reaching her told Officer Moralez to get under way at once.

The next day a lubberly-looking trading craft was sighted, signaled, and from her was taken a number of logs, spades, shovels, spars and planks, but for what purpose the crew could not imagine.

While alongside the coaster the schooner was flying the United States flag, and Captain Brazos and his officers wore the uniform of the American Navy.

It was very evident that Brazos the Buccaneer had loaded the vessel in Boston and sent it out with its queer freight to meet the Sea-Raider out in open water.

"Now, Senor Moralez, put her on her course," said Captain Brazos, after the coaster was a long way off on her return to Boston.

"And the course, sir?" asked Moralez.

"Along the coast to the seaport of G—."

"Ay, ay, sir," and the schooner went on the course as directed.

Several days after the good people of G—awoke one Sunday morning to a surprise that was a perfect mystery.

The sexton of the Reverend Manton Mordecai's church had gone to open it for Sabbath-day service, when something about the graveyard, through which he had to go, struck him as peculiar.

For some time he stood looking about him, unable to detect just what it was.

Then he uttered a cry, which ended with:

"The tomb of Belmont the Buccaneer is gone!"

Down to the parsonage he ran and spread the news, and soon the whole village was in the graveyard and about the spot where had stood the gallows monument.

The grave was there, neatly sodded, and all about it had been well cleaned up.

At the head of the grave was a white marble slab, and upon it was this inscription:

"ERECTED

TO THE MEMORY

OF

FRANK BELMONT.

A brave sailor, a true friend, but unfortunate in that he turned his hand against his fellow-men, and won the name of

BELMONT THE BUCCANEER.

Accursed be he who disturbs his ashes.

Leave him to the mercy of Heaven."

Over and over again was this inscription read by the crowd, and upon every face was stamped a look of mystery.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN EYE-WITNESS.

CAPTAIN CONRAD did not leave G—without going again to the Mordecai parsonage.

He went there and was welcome, and, if there was good in his heart it was touched by the gratitude of old Mr. Mordecai and his wife at his kindness to their son, as they expressed it.

He told them a story of Mark Mordecai to gladden their hearts, of his having changed his wild career, and turned over to the Reverend Mordecai the drafts on a Boston bank for the sum which he had said was left in his hands by the son and brother.

The joy at the change for good in Mark, as Captain Conrad told it, soothed the grief all felt for his untimely end, while his remembrance would only be filled with kindly thoughts, as he had left them a nice little fortune.

Celine had gone into the cemetery with Captain Conrad, at his request, to select a spot where a monument could be erected to the dead sailor, for though he was at the bottom of the sea the stone would be an *In Memoriam* of him.

And this monument Captain Conrad had said should come from him, as a tribute to his old friend Mark, as he put it, and he would at once have it cut in Boston, sent down and put up free of all expense.

This touched the hearts of all, and Captain Conrad left G— with the warmest friendship of the Mordecais.

Some weeks after his departure a vessel came into the little port with freight of a peculiar kind.

It was a monument in the shape of a binnacle, with a spy-glass resting on top, and leaning against it, as it were, an anchor, all skillfully cut in stone.

Upon the top of the binnacle were cut the words:

"IN MEMORIAM

"MARK MORDECAI,

"A devoted son and brother.

"Let those without sin among ye cast the first stone."

The men had orders to put the monument up, on the spot which Celine Mordecai would show them, and every expense had been borne by Captain Conrad.

The spot chosen was a little hill in one part of the cemetery which overlooked the sea, and from whence also the church and churchyard, with the distant village, Beacon Hill and Overlook, could be seen.

Long did Celine linger about the monument, after the workmen had finished their labor and returning to their little vessel had sailed away, and if ever a pirate had prayers sent up for him by innocent lips, Brazos the Buccaneer had.

Dwelling near the cemetery, within view of its graves, and overlooking it from the window of her room in the rectory, Celine Mordecai held no dread of the spot.

She often went there to read, seated in the shadows of the little stone church, or under some spreading tree.

Often, too, by moonlight, she had strolled to the little gate and stood looking in upon the peaceful spot.

The gallows monument impressed her it is true, with the many weird stories connected with it, and she seldom extended her rambles by day in the neighborhood of where lay the ashes of Belmont the Buccaneer.

One night, just after the erection of the monument to the memory of her brother Mark, she was seated in her little room, when she beheld the moon rising out of the sea.

The thought seized upon her to go and see the monument by moonlight.

This thought she at once determined to carry into execution, so throwing her wrap about her, she noiselessly left the house.

There was one drawback to her going there, and she paused as she entered the gate, for she would have to pass near the monument over Belmont the Buccaneer.

But she determined not to turn back, and looking to one side as she passed the pirate's grave, she ventured on, and soon stood by the tomb of her brother.

Hardly had she stopped there when she was startled by hearing voices, and she

crouched down behind the stone, and in its shadow, as she beheld a number of men appear over the cliff from the pathway to the beach.

Celine Mordecai was frightened.

What to do she did not know.

The men passed on and went directly to the tomb of Belmont the Buccaneer.

She could not leave the graveyard from where she was by any other way than the way she came, and to do this she must pass near the men and be seen by them.

So she determined to hide where she was and await their going.

Crouching behind the tomb, she could hear her heart beat as she watched the movements of the men.

Others now came up the cliff path, and she saw that there must be at least three-score, and a number of them were bearing long spars and planks, others ropes and tackle.

What could it mean? She remembered how mysteriously the grim monument had been placed over the buccaneer, for she had heard the story since she was a little girl, and how it got there still remained a mystery.

Still watching she saw the men gather about the weird stone.

There were orders given in a low, stern voice, and she saw spars set on end like Gipsy pot-sticks, and soon with a creaking sound of block and tackle the monument was moved.

But for the stern orders heard now and then and the creaking of the blocks, Celine Mordecai might readily have imagined the moving forms to be black phantoms, so noiselessly they moved about.

Still gazing, while she crouched behind the stone, she saw the massive monument of infamy placed upon rollers and then, put upon planks permitted of its being drawn easily toward the cliff.

She saw the men reach the cliff, and began to feel that she would escape detection after all, when one of the party, whose tall, commanding form loomed up in the moonlight, gave an order to his men, and she heard the words:

"I will soon join you, but lose no time.

"I am going to look at yonder monument."

It was to the one behind which Celine crouched that he referred and she felt as though she would spring to her feet and bound away.

But her limbs seemed powerless to obey her will and the next moment the man was within ten feet of her and escape was impossible.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A SECRET BETWEEN THEM.

THE feelings of Celine Mordecai can be better imagined than described.

She had dared to go alone by night into the graveyard, grieving for her brother, and the thought of the fear of the dead had been far from her thoughts.

But instead the living had been the ones to cause alarm.

She gazed spellbound upon the tall form approaching, and she beheld a man clad in uniform, and with a sword hanging by his side.

She saw that he would discover her within another instant, and with a mighty effort she arose to her feet, her hands clinging to the stone binnacle monument, to support her trembling form.

The crew had disappeared over the cliff, the monument having been rapidly rolled down the pathway, and the murmur of voices came to her ears.

Then Celine faced the one who confronted her. There could be no mistaking the form and face. The moonlight revealed both distinctly, and Celine knew the one before her.

But, as she rose, robed in white as she was, the sailor stopped, threw his pistol forward and cried sternly:

"Spirit or human, stand or I fire!"

"Captain Conrad! do you not know me?" came from the lips of the frightened girl.

Springing to her side he said:

"A thousand pardons, Miss Mordecai, but I came here to visit your brother's tomb, and your presence, all in white, startled me, I confess. It is daring in you to come here alone."

"Oh, sir, I am all unnerved now, for I came to visit the tomb by moonlight. I did not fear the dead, and the living nearly frightened me to death; for your men came while I was here, and I could not escape."

"My poor child, you must indeed have been alarmed; but, there is no danger now, and, after I have looked at this monument, I will escort you from the burying-ground. How strange that we should have met here."

"Yes, strange indeed, for I came from an impulse which I could not resist; but, oh, Captain Conrad, let me thank you for this exquisite tribute to the memory of poor Mark."

"It has been admired by all, and when Mark's friend has been so good as to erect a monument over him, no unkind things are said of my brother now, as in the olden time."

"Then, too, father has told how Mark left his fortune, and we are congratulated upon all sides."

"Let me thank you again," and she held out both hands, which the buccaneer warmly grasped.

"Miss Mordecai, I have but done my duty—nay, I have not done half what I should," he said, impressively.

"To meet one such as you are, to meet another like Miss Norma Sprague, raises my fellow-beings in my estimation."

"Then, too, there is your noble old father, whom I greatly respect, while your mother and brother will hold a warm place ever in my heart."

"I wish, knowing you as I do, Miss Mordecai, that I was a better man."

"You certainly are not an evil man, Captain Conrad, are you?"

The question startled him, and it was a moment before he replied:

"I fear I am not a good man."

"My life has been an adventurous, roving one, and I am sure that I have caused much unhappiness and misery in the world, Miss Mordecai."

"And much happiness, too, if you have been to others what you have to us."

"I would that I could say in your sweet presence that I had given more happiness to my fellow-creatures; but I can frankly say now, Miss Mordecai, that the future years of my life shall be spent striving for a better aim than in the past."

"Let me ask you if you are not surprised to see me here to-night, in command of a vessel?"

"I am, for I supposed you had returned to your Southern home, as you said you intended doing upon leaving here."

"I will tell you that I was detained in having this monument carved, and wished it to be set up before I should leave, for I desired to have a look at it by night, though I certainly did not expect the pleasure of meeting you."

"I am glad that I have seen you again, Captain Conrad," was the innocent reply.

"And I am glad to have met you here, for now I can explain why I have come."

"Do you not wonder?"

"I confess to having my full share of the curiosity possessed by my sex," she said, with a smile.

"And yet you have not asked me?"

"I left it for you to tell me."

"You have seen that the monument of Belmont the Buccaneer has been removed?"

"Yes, as mysteriously as report has it that it came here."

"It was brought here as it will be taken away, by a crew by night, and from a vessel anchored near."

"But by whom?"

"That is a mystery to me, Miss Mordecai, as to you and others."

"But you are taking it away."

"Yes."

"And why?"

"Miss Mordecai, long years ago, when you were a little child, the man whose ashes lie yonder was my friend."

"A buccaneer he became, I admit; but his life was a strange one and he had much of sorrow in it."

"He suffered the penalty of his crimes, for he died at the yard-arm, hanged for piracy; but that seemed not enough to some one who hunted him down after death and placed over him the cruel monument of infamy which I have just removed."

"As he was once my friend, so I efface the mark of infamy from his grave and place there a headstone."

"Come and see it, please."

He spoke earnestly, and she followed him in silence.

As she read the inscription, she said:

"You have well said, Captain Conrad:

"'Leave him to the mercy of heaven.'"

"Yes, for he has suffered by the hand of man."

"Now you know, Miss Mordecai, why I have come here like a thief in the night and removed the monument, which I shall sink into the sea."

"I had hoped not to be seen, and to remove every trace of our coming, other than that the other monument would be found gone and this one in its place."

"But you have discovered my coming and know my secret."

"I will not betray it, Captain Conrad."

"I thank you, and I shall feel that you will not."

"From here I sail southward, for I have work to do, and some day when I return I shall hope to see you again."

"May I?"

"You will ever be welcome at Mordecai Parsonage, Captain Conrad."

"Now let me see you to the gate, for it is growing late, and as soon as I have done so I will return on board my vessel and set sail, for my men must have the monument upon the raft by this time, and I will tow it out to sea and bury the grim stone in the deep."

He led her toward the gate of the cemetery, and there halted, while he held forth his hand with the remark:

"Remember, this is a secret between us, Miss Mordecai."

"I shall not betray it."

"Good-by, Captain Conrad."

Another moment and she was gone, and regaining the parsonage she was soon in her own room.

Looking out of her window she saw the white sails of a large schooner lying off-shore.

As she gazed the vessel began to move, and watching it she beheld it stand out to sea and disappear in the distance.

Then she hastened to retire, for it was nearly dawn.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A SUSPICION.

THE village of G— was all upset, so to speak.

Its citizens were completely mystified.

The attack upon the buccaneer on the Maine Coast, which had resulted in the loss of Basil Brent and others had greatly stirred up the community.

A number of wounded men were yet unable to get about, and so the people still kept that disaster in view.

Then a visitor came to the town, one Don Rafael, who had created an excitement, and upon his heels almost came Captain Conrad, with news that Mark Mordecai had reformed of his wild habits, had been lost at sea, and left a handsome fortune to his parents, brother and sister.

Next was the death of the vagabond, Jack Cade, killed by Captain Conrad for attempting to murder and rob him, and following upon this was the startling discovery that the gallows monument had been spirited away in the night and a simple headstone left in its place.

The erection of a monument to Mark Mordecai by Captain Conrad had been an event also; but this spiriting away of the one over the buccaneer's ashes was something that was unfathomable.

The ground about it was pressed down, it is true, and here and then there was evidence that the work had been no easy task.

But all had been cleared up about the grave and the marble slab was in its place as though it had been there for years.

There were traces on the cliff path, as though a heavy object had been moved down there; but the sands on the beach had been swept by a high tide and so left no imprint of what had been done there.

Afar off on the sea horizon a sail was seen; but whether it had anything to do with removing the monument of Belmont the Buc-

caneer, those who saw it could only guess at.

And so, on that holy Sabbath morn the villagers congregated in the churchyard, and those who wished to linger there, to see if aught could be learned to solve the mystery, attended service at the church of the Reverend Mordecai.

The result of this was that Manton Mordecai preached to the largest congregation of his life, and the collection taken up doubled any he had ever had before, which caused an old sinner to remark:

"'It's an ill wind that blows nobody some good.'"

And the Reverend Manton Mordecai preached at his best, too, really, by his eloquence causing several to feel that they were wrong in not belonging to his church, especially as he had been left a fortune, and a rich parson was a rarity in those days.

"Maybe he won't want no pay for preachin' now."

"I guess I'll j'ine his church," said an old man who was a kind of pious weathercock, having already drifted about through the different denominations in the town.

And Parson Mordecai had also seen the inscription on the stone left in place of the gallows monument, and he took from it for his text the words:

"Leave him to the mercy of Heaven."

It was a good text, and the sermon was a good one, and struck a chord in many a kindly heart.

There were some present who thought that he was throwing stones from the pulpit at those who had abused his brother Mark so thoroughly, and which the change in monuments over the pirate's grave gave him a chance to do; but be this as it may, Parson Mordecai acquitted himself well, and his congregation went off well pleased with his effort.

Commodore Sprague and Norma were also there, and created a sensation, for the old seaman never went to church, and people said it had been only the removing of the monument that had gotten him there that day, though his daughter was a devout attendant.

And in her pew, quiet, and yet with a blush of conscious guilt, if guilt it could be called, for keeping the secret, sat Celine Mordecai.

Not a soul would have thought that she could solve the mystery, and yet she was the only one who could explain it there.

She had risen at her accustomed hour, and seemed to feel that her secret was read in her face by her parents and brother.

But soon she knew that it was only her fears that made her feel so, and so she tried to look indifferent, and appear calm.

As people talked while they hurried by to the cemetery, Celine heard many suggestions as to what it all meant, and she started as an old sailor's voice fell on her ears with the words:

"I tells yer, mates, ther man as 'rected that moniment were a inemy to ther buccaneer, that's sart'in; but ther man as tuk it away were a pirate himself."

"A pirate!" gasped Celine to herself.

"What is he in reality?"

"He said that he was a Southern planter, and yet he wore a uniform and sword, and his men were all armed."

"Ah, what can he be?"

This thought, advanced by the old sailor on his way back from the graveyard, seemed to worry Celine greatly, though she was angry with herself for having a suspicion against the man who had been her brother's friend.

"It is but the talk of an old sailor, and I will dismiss it from my mind," she said.

And she tried to, but the thought had taken root, and the gossip of many caused it to grow and grow until it became a fixed fact in the minds of the villagers that the one who had removed the gallows monument from the grave of Belmont the Buccaneer was himself a pirate.

And the worthy villagers of G—deserved credit for getting so very near the truth, though to her own heart Celine Mordecai defended Captain Conrad against all suspicion.

"Oh, if they only knew my secret, what would they say?" she asked herself over and over again.

But she kept her secret faithfully, and resolved when next she saw Captain Courad to frankly tell him of all that was said and ask him to tell her just what he was.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BOB BRENT SURPRISED.

THE raft on which was the ghastly stone gallows, the monument from the grave of Belmont the Buccaneer, was towed out to sea by the schooner, and there pulled apart, allowing the stone to sink into the depths of the ocean.

Then the schooner held on its way southward.

During the next day the lookout aloft called out:

"Sail ho!"

"Whereaway?" asked Officer Moralez who was on deck at the time.

"She's five points off the starboard bow, sir, and looks like a Spanish clipper ship."

"Richly freighted, doubtless?"

"Head for her, helmsman."

The man at the wheel was about to obey when Captain Brazos came on deck.

"I forgot to tell you, Moralez, that I do not intend to give chase to any craft on our sail, or to bring any to."

"Head for our island retreat and crowd in canvas to get there as soon as possible."

Officer Moralez gave the necessary orders, though he appeared greatly surprised.

So the schooner held on her way and two weeks after was among the West Indian Islands.

On one of these, far off the course of any vessel, unless it was a man-of-war searching for outlaw craft, was an island which Captain Brazos had selected as his home.

It was a safe retreat, hard to reach unless under a skillful pilot, and was a pretty spot withal, for the little island was rich in fruit and by no means an unpleasant abiding-place.

The buccaneer had here his supplies, and was often wont to send to the island a craft that might come in useful for its spars, sails or other portions of it in repairing damages.

Half a dozen men were kept upon the island, and they had a small boat in which they could escape among the latter islands should a vessel-of-war attack their retreat.

There were cool shade trees scattered here and there about the island, a spring of icy water and the air was balmy and refreshing.

Into the little harbor, where were a dozen crafts of various sizes and kinds, the schooner glided and dropped anchor.

The topmasts of the vessels there had been housed, so that they could not be seen above the tree-tops, and unless it was known to be the retreat of buccaneers, few commanders of war-craft would care to attempt a landing there.

Once the schooner had dropped anchor, the wounded, for there were half a dozen on board more or less severely wounded, were removed to the shore and found a pleasant retreat where they could readily build up in strength and health.

There were several cabins constructed, and so the wounded were not meant to be allowed to suffer, as the pirate surgeon was ordered above by Captain Brazos to look after them.

From the goods on the island the buccaneer chief selected his most valuable captives, and had them stowed on board his schooner while he remarked to Officer Moralez:

"I will have a valuable cargo this time to transfer to the hands of the captain of the Golden Hope."

"You will indeed, senor; but we lost some valuable prizes I am sure, on our run here."

"We doubtless did; but we can make it up at another time."

"It is your intention, is it not, Captain Brazos, to take the brig?"

"The Golden Hope?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is, and for that reason I wish to metamorphose the schooner now into an honest-looking merchant craft, so get the men to work and paint her hull black and scrape the red paint off her hull."

"Yes, sir."

"I shall lend this schooner to my agent, and take his brig, for I need a faster vessel, as it will never do, Senor Moralez, for us to be taken, and also not be able to overhaul any craft that we may wish."

"True, sir, and I am glad you intend taking the schooner," and officer Moralez set the men to work upon the vessel.

After a short delay at the island retreat the schooner got up anchor and sailed away northward, leaving her surgeon and several more of her crew on the island to look after her wounded.

"We will just about head the Golden Hope off, Senor Moralez, if this wind holds good," said Captain Brazos, when one day the schooner was bowling swiftly along toward the locality where the buccaneer craft had been wont to meet the Golden Hope.

Hardly had Captain Brazos uttered the words, when the lookout called down to the deck:

"Ho the brig, sir."

"Ay, ay, sir, I see her now, and it is the Golden Hope," answered Captain Brazos, as out of a fog-bank suddenly appeared the beautiful craft over whose destinies Bob Brent presided as master.

She was bowling along under easy sail, and her course indicated that she was on her way to port.

"She has made a good run, sir, and is here before us."

"Yes, for to-day is the appointed time, and she has three days' grace, Mr. Moralez."

The brig was now plainly seen, but a signal from the schooner to her seemed to cause some excitement on board, as in fact it had, for the buccaneer craft had not been sighted by those on the Golden Hope until the signal was displayed.

It happened that it was mere chance that the two vessels had met there, for it will be remembered that Bob Brent had put to sea believing Captain Brazos to have been killed, as Rodriguez, the Pilot, had reported to him.

He had congratulated himself upon his brother's death, which would give him Overlook and the rest of the fortune, while it left him free to marry Norma Sprague, and he felt happy over the fact that Captain Brazos being dead also he would not have to give up his beautiful brig, for should Moralez become the pirate chief he would not know, doubtless, of what had passed between his chief and himself as to the winning of the Golden Hope.

Should Moralez meet the brig with a cargo, he would take it, letting him understand that he would continue with him the same arrangement he had had with Brazos; but he meant to play him false by simply selling the cargo for his own and disposing of his brig for the best price he could get, and then retire to Overlook and live a life of luxurious ease.

When, therefore, the Red Sea-Raider was sighted at the ocean rendezvous, Bob Brent was in an angry mood, for he had hoped that she would not be there.

"Moralez is, as I feared, going to keep the compact of Brazos with me; but I'll quit this trip, and he'll never see a dollar of gold for the cargo he turns over to me."

"No, he cannot trace me, and I'll take good care no one else shall, for the past shall be buried, now that I have a fortune and will win Norma Sprague."

So saying Bob Brent turned his eyes upon the schooner, as the two vessels neared each other.

Suddenly his gaze became riveted, and his face paled, while he shouted in a tone that startled all who heard him:

"Bring me that glass!"

The mate of the brig sprang forward and handed it to him, and his face became livid as he muttered the words betimes:

"Great Heaven! it is Brazos himself!"

CHAPTER XL.

THE GAME OF CHANCE.

THE discovery of the Sea-Raider's schooner had at first startled all the brig, as they had not recognized her with black hull and unpainted spars.

But a second glance showed that the black paint over the red and scraping of her spars had disguised her.

The lookout on the brig had not been very wide-awake, so the two vessels were but a mile apart when the schooner was sighted, and the fog-bank had kept them concealed from each other.

When he saw that he must face the buccaneer, Bob Brent determined, as has been said, to make it the last time.

But when he discovered that it was not Moralez in command, but the Red Sea-Raider himself, he was almost unnerved.

Silently he cursed Rodriguez for deceiving him, and the fearful thought flashed upon him that perhaps his brother Basil was also alive.

But he had to make the best of it, and so he made up his mind to face the ordeal and try some other plan to get rid of the buccaneer.

In the mean time the two vessels were now within hailing distance of each other, and Brazos called out:

"Ho the Golden Hope!"

"Aho, the Red-Raider," was returned in the tones of Captain Bob Brent, and they were very sullen tones, too.

"Lay to, and come on board, Captain Brent."

"Ay, ay," and soon after the brig swept up into the wind, and a boat left her side.

"Glad to see you, captain."

"Hope you have had a pleasant voyage," said Captain Brazos, meeting him at the gangway and leading him to the cabin.

Bob Brent did not look in a good humor. He knew that he had lost his brig to the buccaneer, and more, he had failed in destroying him as he had hoped to do.

"You are prompt, Captain Brent, at the rendezvous."

"I always try to be, senor."

"Help yourself to the decanter, and tell me if you were not surprised at the finding my change of colors?"

"Yes, and I at first started to run, but felt that I could not be mistaken in the hull and rig of your vessel."

"You keep a poor watch, for we saw you ten minutes before you did us."

"Yes, and I will see that the lookout is punished; but the fog-banks hid us out of sight of each other, and I am glad you proved not to be a foe, though the Golden Hope can show her heels to anything."

"Yes, and I shall be happy in the possession of such a craft."

"You will take her from me, then?"

"Of course, why not?"

"I was in hopes that you would not."

"You were mistaken in your hopes, for it is the craft a pirate needs, while this schooner has seldom met her match, and I shall let you have her, for she will serve you well as a merchant craft."

"I am glad that you will at least let me have your schooner."

"For gold."

"For gold?"

"Yes."

"Do you mean I am to buy her from you?"

"Yes, or win her at cards."

"I will play for her if I have to, and will stake against her five thousand dollars."

"You are generous, when I risked such a splendid sum against the brig."

"She is a different craft."

"She is not worth two of the schooner, Captain Brent; but come, we lose time, so we will run for some harbor on the coast, where I can transfer my guns to the brig, and leave the schooner to you."

"I will give the orders," and Brazos called out to Officer Moralez to put both vessels away for some secluded harborage on the coast.

Bob Brent was powerless to object.

He had lost his brig by gambling for her, and he had to risk a large sum to get the schooner.

Should he lose he would be just where he was before.

Fortune seemed to be turning against him.

"It was seeing that accursed grave of ill-omen by moonlight," he muttered with the superstition of a sailor, recalling that the night when his brother and Norma had passed the grave by moonlight; that he had not only been there, but had tolled the bell in the steeple to further alarm them.

It was soon arranged that the sum to be staked against the schooner should be ten thousand dollars, and the game was begun, Jet coming in as before and standing near the merchant captain, while he eagerly watched the players.

"I have won your gold, Captain Brent, and you are still without a vessel," said the Red Sea-Raider, as he threw down the card that made him winner of the game.

"Curses, yes! What am I to do?"
 "Buy the schooner, as you have no luck at gambling," was the cool reply.

"I will not buy the schooner, for I shall give up the sea, so put me and my crew ashore, Captain Brazos," was the angry reply.

"Oh, no, not a bit of it, Brent, and don't lose your temper."

"You are rich, as I know, and we are making money rapidly together, as you know, and I have no idea of letting you give up the ship thus soon in our compact."

"You must make several more voyages, and then you can retire with a handsome fortune, and I can do the same; but for the present, it is sink or swim together."

Bob Brent gritted his teeth with rage.

He was at the mercy of the man, and he had to obey.

"By the way, Brent, if it was any one else I would owe him a grudge; but do you know that I came very near losing my life at your brother's hands since I saw you?"

"My brother's?" gasped Bob Brent.

"Yes; Lieutenant Basil Brent, of the navy."

"I don't understand."

"Oh, I know that you are the brother of Lieutenant Basil Brent, and—"

"I do not deny that, as we have met in Boston, and you knew who I was when I first saw you; but how did you meet my brother?"

And Bob Brent was anxious to know how much the Red Raider did know about the attack upon him.

"Well, I was in hiding with my vessel, as you know, on the Maine coast, and got word from a lookout that a vessel was creeping close inshore, as though hunting for me."

"So I got the schooner afloat, called the men to resist boarders, and beat back an attack made in boats that night, though I received this wound, which was a close call from death."

And the Red Raider raised a lock of hair on his head, and showed where the bullet of Rodriguez had cut its way.

"The leader of the expedition fell upon my decks, and upon going to Boston, which I did several days after, I learned that the attack had been made by Lieutenant Basil Brent, of the navy, who had in some way learned of my presence on the coast and organized an expedition against me."

"This is strange, for I left my brother at home and I hope you are mistaken," said Bob Brent, telling the falsehood without a change of countenance, other than one of sorrow at the fate of his brother.

"There is no mistake, for the officer's sword had your brother's name on it, and there it hangs," and the Red Raider pointed to an elegant sword hanging up in the cabin.

"Poor Basil! alas, what a sad fate, my poor, noble brother," and Bob Brent arose and approached the sword.

"Yes, it is his," and he turned his face away as though to conceal his emotion, and did not see the look of contempt that flashed over the countenance of the pirate captain at his hypocrisy.

CHAPTER XLI.

BOB BRENT FORMS A PLOT.

AFTER a few moments of silence, as though suffering deep grief at what he heard, Bob Brent turned to Captain Brazos and said:

"And you heard in Boston, you say, that my brother led the attack?"

"Yes, there is no doubt about it."

"Poor Basil! I must have sailed about the time that he left, for I went up to Boston some days after seeing you."

"Well, he fell on my deck, and was as brave as a lion, too; but now let us talk business."

"Well?"

"You wish to purchase the schooner?"

"I will have to."

"You can say that I ran upon you in a fog, so that you could not escape, took your vessel, transferred my guns to her, and helped myself to your cargo, but let you have my craft and the liberty of yourself and crew."

"Now I want ten thousand dollars for my vessel, and as that will be about the amount of your interest in my pirate freight, you can leave that sum in Rothschild's hands for me."

"I hope you understand?"

"Perfectly; but your cargo must be a rich one."

"It is, or you would not get ten thousand as your share."

"And then?"

"Oh, keep up your voyages, and meet me at our sea rendezvous about as before."

"I would rather give up this life."

"Not yet. Wait."

"For what?"

"Until you have made a couple more voyages, and you can be that much richer."

This tempted Bob Brent, and he decided to do as the Sea-Raider said.

He loved gold, and wished to grasp all that he could.

He would then sell his vessel and retire from the sea making Norma Sprague his wife.

And so it was arranged between the two captains, and, upon reaching a secluded harbor on the coast that night, the transfer of cargo and guns was begun.

The pirate crew worked with a will, as did also the men of the brig, whom Bob Brent paid most liberally to silence them, should they feel inclined to betray them.

After the transfer the two vessels parted company, the brig, christened the Sea-Raider by her captain, going off on a cruise, as he said, for other booty, while the buccaneer schooner, stripped of her guns and with a merchant crew, headed for Boston under command of Bob Brent.

And Captain Bob Brent was in ill-humor.

Matters had not all gone as he had wished.

The Sea-Raider yet lived, but the brother whom he had plotted against was no longer in his way.

He had lost his beautiful brig, but he had certainly a very fine craft in her stead, though she had cost him a round sum.

So these losses and gains about offset each other, while wholly in his favor was the thought that he would marry Norma Sprague and be the master of his brother's home of Overlook.

"Let me get a little more money, then sell this schooner in the West Indies for a good sum, paying off the crew there and leading them to believe that I intend to live in Cuba, and I will be safe."

"I can then return home and marry Norma, and if I can bury the phantoms of the past and gold will make me happy, I certainly should be."

"But about that Sea-Raider?"

"He knows me as I am, and where my home is, which my crew do not."

"He may be dangerous, and I think I had best concoct some plan to get rid of him."

"But what?"

"He is as wary as a fox and brave as a lion, while he can be fierce as a tiger if cornered."

"Ah! I think I have a plan now flashing through my brain."

"It must be worked with circumspection though, or it may get me into trouble."

"I will try it however, and, as Brazos said that he was coming to Boston next week, I shall spring my trap then."

So mused Bob Brent as he sat in the cabin of the schooner, as it sailed swiftly along toward Boston.

He felt that he had begun by crime to aid his way to fortune and to win Norma Sprague, and that crimes must yet be committed to save him from being found out as he was.

A life or two more would make no difference to him, he thought, and if he could get rid of the Red Sea-Raider by a strategic act he would be able to at once sell the schooner and retire from the sea to consummate his plans at home.

The next day the schooner entered port and dropped anchor, and Bob Brent reported to the authorities that he had been captured by the Red Sea-Raider, robbed of much of his valuable cargo and had been forced to take the schooner in the place of his own beautiful vessel.

The two mates of the vessel substantiated the report and the news spread like wildfire and feeling himself quite a hero after his adventure, Bob Brent went to the social rendezvous the night after his arrival in town, as was his wont, to pose before his admirers, and the first one to come forward and offer his condolences upon his misfortune was Captain Conrad.

CHAPTER XLII.

A SEA-RAIDER MAKES A VISIT.

BOB BRENT bit his lips to keep down his anger, at sight of the Red Sea-Raider in Boston.

He had expected him there, it was true, though not for several weeks, and there he was, as Captain Carlos Conrad, the Southern planter, making himself perfectly at home in a city where there was a price on his head.

But to betray the Sea-Raider was to betray himself, so Bob Brent quietly accepted the situation and talked pleasantly with the pretended planter.

As he stood there he knew that many eyes were upon him, for he knew that he was regarded as the hero of a great adventure; but he could not but feel how much more the man at his side would be gazed at, if it was suspected who he was.

So Bob Brent accepted the invitation of the planter to dine with him at his rooms the next day, and kept the appointment promptly.

"You did not expect to find me here?" said the Sea-Raider with a smile, acting in his pretended character of Planter Conrad.

"No, I confess I was surprised, for I left you at sea."

"The idea struck me to visit port first, so I ran close inshore, hailed a smack and came into the town," and then Captain Conrad called to Jet that they were ready for dinner.

"And the brig?" asked Bob Brent, while the thought flashed through his mind that perhaps a second expedition might be successful in capturing the vessel.

"Ah! since my last narrow escape I will keep her at sea cruising, for I have perfect confidence in Moralez; but how was your story received?"

"Without the slightest suspicion."

"That was on account of the character you bear as an honest man."

"But will you remain in the city or go home?"

"I shall not go home until just before I sail and then run down for a day or so only."

"Will you remain long?"

"About two weeks; but when will you sail?"

"In just three weeks; but do you know you are so comfortable here I am half inclined to get rooms for myself, so as to have them when in port."

"It would be a good idea, as one might as well make themselves comfortable in this world."

"True, and I will do so, and I shall expect you to dine with me."

"With pleasure," and the Sea-Raider helped his guest to the best of everything, and yet Bob Brent felt a certain uneasiness.

There was a certain something in the manner of the pirate which seemed to him dangerous, and he mused to himself that he would get rid of him at any cost and his first step in the way of accomplishing this was to procure for himself pleasant rooms.

He secured these a trifle out of the aristocratic quarter, and in a street that was very little frequented.

Then he got his rooms upon the lower floor, and at once proceeded to make himself as comfortable as had the pirate, by the addition of many little luxuries.

For his servant he took one of his crew, and brought his own steward from the vessel to do his cooking.

And in all this he was carrying out the plot he had formed to get rid of the pirate.

One day he received a note in a handwriting that he knew well.

It read as follows:

"Have heard of cruisers being on the coast, so feel anxious about my vessel."

"Will charter a smack and run out to-night, but will return within week and enjoy that dinner with you."

Yours,

CONRAD.

"And when he returns his doom is sealed," said Bob Brent, when he had read the note, which one of his crew had handed to him, saying that a man had brought it on board.

But Captain Conrad had not told exactly the truth in his note to Bob Brent.

He had left town, yes—but not in a smack.

He had not gone either to see about his vessel, for he felt little anxiety about her, in

spite of a rumor that cruisers were searching the coast for the Red Sea-Raider.

The pirate had left the city in a carriage, which he had engaged to drive him to G—, and when Bob Brent received his note he was well on the road to that pleasant little seaport.

Why he had gone he could not exactly tell, for he really had nothing to call him there.

He had a desire to see Celine again, and that was at the bottom of it all, and perhaps one of those strange presentiments which we sometimes have urged him to it.

The lovely face of Celine Mordecai had haunted him, and her innocent nature had won his hardened heart.

He was playing a deep game, which will be revealed in good time, and he tried to convince himself that the seeing of Celine was necessary to its success.

And so, as Captain Carlos Conrad, a Southern planter, he again put up at the Pot Luck Inn, greatly to the delight of the genial host, Landlord Berry.

He found that he was not forgotten.

The people still regarded him as a hero, and remembered his generosity in treating them.

But, after one of Host Berry's good dinners and a bottle of wine, the pirate started forth to make calls.

He had but two that he cared to make.

He would first visit Beacon Hill, and see if he could glean any information regarding Bob Brent, which that personage had not told him regarding his movements.

Captain Conrad did not care to be seen at G— by Bob Brent; but if the latter should happen there, he certainly felt that he would be equal to the occasion.

Captain Brent had told him he meant to run down to G—, only the day before sailing.

Captain Conrad would find out if he intended doing differently from what he had said.

When he arrived at Beacon Hill, Commodore Sprague was occupying his favorite seat upon the piazza.

His face paled as he recognized the visitor, and he made a mental vow that Brazos the Buccaneer must die.

"I'll never be easy until he is dead," he said to himself; but as his daughter just then came out on the piazza, he smothered his feelings and greeted "his old friend" with real warmth.

Norma also bade him a friendly welcome, and said that she was glad to see that he had again visited G—.

"It is only for a day, I fear, as I may be called back to Boston at any time on business; but is not your neighbor, Captain Bob Brent, here?" he asked.

"No, he has been detained in Boston by important business, and will only run down for a day before sailing, so he tells me in a letter received," said the commodore.

"So far he told the truth," muttered the buccaneer, while aloud he said:

"He has become quite a hero in the city, through his adventure with the pirate known as the Red Sea-Raider."

"Yes, and how sad that he should have lost his beautiful vessel!"

"I almost fear that it will make him give up the sea," Norma remarked.

"She fears he may give up the sea; she does not love him, that is certain," mused the buccaneer.

And after a visit of half an hour longer, he took his leave, promising to call again if he was not summoned immediately away from town, and leaving the commodore uneasy as to why he had come at all.

From Beacon Hill the Sea-Raider walked over to Overlook, to take a survey of that handsome old house, and he seemed to greatly admire the mansion in spite of its neglected look.

As he stood at the gate regarding it, the old man whom Bob Brent had left in charge came toward him, and spoke politely.

"A fine old place, old man, and it's a pity to see it going to ruin."

"Yes, sir, but it will soon come round all right, for the young master has given orders to have it put in splendid shape, and he's to refurbish it from cellar to garret and make it as fine as any country gentleman's home in

the old country." And the old man spoke with enthusiasm.

"It is owned by Captain Brent, I've been told?"

"Yes, sir, Cap'n Bob owns it, and a fine fellow he is, and he's made the money, too, like a gentleman, and I'm glad of it, though I think had Master Basil not been killed, fighting those wicked pirates, he'd have made it a finer house than even his brother, and I'd have rather had him for the master, though perhaps I sh'udn't say so; but then you're a stranger, be you not?"

"Yes, I'm a stranger, and as I knew Lieutenant Basil Brent, I am sorry, too, that he was not the one to enjoy living here, for he was a gentleman, every inch of him."

"Here, old man, drink my health," and dropping a piece of gold into the palm of the old servitor of Bob Brent, the buccaneer continued on his way, taking the path that led him down toward the Mordecai house.

CHAPTER XLIII.

AT THE GRAVE OF MARK MORDECAI.

THE welcome which was given the Red Sea-Raider at the Mordecai Parsonage was a sincere one.

The old couple, who had been keeping pretty much to themselves, had been bought out, as it were, by the fact that their loved son, the black sheep of the family, had proven himself a man before his death and had not forgotten them.

The fact that he had not died a miserable sinner, as the good old people put it, cheered them immensely, and with the money which had been left them many comforts and luxuries had been purchased which seemed to give them a new lease on life.

"We are so glad to see you, and we hoped you would come, for we heard that you were in town," said Mrs. Mordecai, while her husband added:

"Yes, you are ever welcome in this home, Captain Conrad."

"If they but knew," flashed through the thoughts of the pirate, as his own unworthiness came up before him.

Then the Reverend Manton pressed his hand warmly, while Celine gave him a greeting which said:

"I am so glad you have come, and you will find that I have not betrayed your secret."

"You must stay to supper with us," said the parson, and as all urged in a way that showed that they meant it, the buccaneer accepted the invitation, for he did not wish to leave this pretty scene of home life and go out again into the gloom of his own meditations.

And so he remained to supper.

And such a supper as it was would have tempted the most satiated epicure, for Celine had done her best to excel all of her other efforts.

A servant had been secured, since they were able to pay for her services, and yet Celine had the management of all.

After the meal, which the Sea-Raider ate with a relish that surprised himself, they adjourned to the parlor, and there Celine sat down to her harp and sung in a rich voice, full of melody and pathos.

The buccaneer also sung, when asked, accompanying himself upon a guitar, which poor Mark Mordecai had sent to his sister years before.

There was something about this dark-faced man that seemed to fascinate Celine Mordecai.

She recalled the words of those who had said that a pirate only would remove the grim monument from a pirate's grave, and she scouted the very idea, and blamed herself for having held a suspicion of him.

But yet the man fascinated her.

He was nearly double her years, for he was little under two-score, and she in her twentieth year; but yet he seemed to her a man to win a woman's heart and keep it.

Had he ever loved? Was he married?

These questions she asked herself over and over again.

He had spoken little of his past, though he had told stories of scenes in his life which had deeply interested all.

The parson seemed greatly pleased with him.

He looked upon him as a man of the world, and yet he was willing to call him his friend.

The conversation fell upon the mysterious removing of the monument of Belmont the Buccaneer, and Manton Mordecai remarked that the little cemetery was more dreaded than ever.

The Sea-Raider laughed lightly at this, and said:

"What fools we mortals be."

Then he spoke seriously:

"Why, I cannot understand one having dread of the dead."

"One who has seen men die by dozens, has seen a man a dangerous foe in life, and a helpless mass of humanity when dying or dead, can never fear a body from which life has fled, as far as I can understand it."

"And have you seen men die then?" asked Mrs. Mordecai, and Celine drew her breath and awaited his answer anxiously.

"Yes, madam, for I have seen service in our late war and have often been in a sea combat, though I hope never again to be forced to take the life of a fellow-being."

"But it is late, so I must go, and if I may do so I will call again to see you when once more I return to Boston."

Thus they parted, and going forth into the bright moonlight he stood for a moment outside of the little gate regarding the exquisite beauty of the night.

The moon was at its full, and the scene was one of rare loveliness.

Quieted by the beauty of the night he turned his steps toward the little burying-ground, unmindful that a fair face was at a window regarding him, for Celine had gone to her room and going to look out upon the sea had discovered that he had not gone toward the village, but was walking in the direction of the graveyard.

She sat by the window watching him until his form mingled with the gravestones in the churchyard; but still she remained at her post.

Upon entering the cemetery the Red Sea-Raider made his way across the sacred ground in the direction of the monument which he had erected to Mark Mordecai's memory.

Mrs. Mordecai had told him, while Celine was looking after the supper, that her daughter carried a fresh bunch of flowers every day and placed them upon the monument.

So he wended his way to the spot to take several of the flowers away as a souvenir of the young girl who was gaining such a warm place in his regard.

He was glancing out upon the sea, as he approached, so did not see a man's form passing along the path that led to the "Binnacle Monument," as Mark Mordecai's tomb was called by the villagers.

The stranger was in sailor garb and stopped, as he was passing the monument as though struck by its unique design.

"That is a new one, and erected to some sailor who must have been dearly loved by those who put this costly bit of stone here," he said.

Seeing an inscription he bent over and read by the aid of the moonlight a few words of what was cut in the stone.

Then a cry escaped the young sailor's lips and he fairly caught at the monument for support, while he bent over it and cried in ringing tones:

"Great God! this monument is erected to me!"

The roar of the surf falling upon the beach drowned the cry and words of the sailor, so that they did not reach the ears of the Sea-Raider, while his eyes were not bent upon the monument as he approached it.

The very attitude of the sailor, leaning over the monument, about which his arms were clasped, prevented his being seen until he was almost upon him.

Then, as he glanced in that direction, his quick eye detected the form and, quick as a flash, he had drawn a pistol from beneath his coat.

"Who are you?"

The words were crisp and stern, and the one to whom they were addressed started quickly, stood up, and Mark Mordecai and the man who had made him take the leap from the cliff on the Maine coast stood face to face.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A COMPROMISE.

THE Red Sea-Raider was a man of remarkable nerve. He was not one to be readily taken off guard, and yet the position in which he found himself that night in the cemetery of G— standing face to face with Mark Mordecai was enough to appall the bravest man.

It was a startling situation.

Mark Mordecai stood by the side of a monument erected to his memory, and the Sea-Raider stood confronting a man whose life he had taken, as he supposed.

For a moment each man glared at the other.

In that moment the buccaneer regained his nerve.

"Mark Mordecai, is that you?" he asked, calmly.

"It is."

"I was almost surprised into believing in ghosts; but I see that you are in the flesh."

"I am," again came the deep response.

"I suppose you know me?"

"Yes, Brazos the Buccaneer."

"Sh—don't speak that name even where ghosts alone can hear it."

"I am glad, indeed, that you are not dead."

"Glad?"

"Yes, for the grief of those who loved you touched my heart."

"Have you come here to do as you promised?"

"I did that long ago."

"Then why are you here now?" almost fiercely asked the man.

"I came here on a matter of importance, and something, I know not what, impelled my steps hither."

"Have you seen my people?"

"All of them, for I left them but a short while ago."

"And you told them I died a pirate?"

"Mark Mordecai you do not know me to say that."

"What did you tell them?"

"That you had been master of one of my vessels and had been lost at sea, but had left in my hands your money, so if aught befell you I was to give it to them."

"I told them I was your friend and placed in their hands the fifteen thousand dollars."

"Fifteen thousand dollars?"

"There was not half that sum."

"Pardon me, Mordecai, but when I saw how poor you people were I made it the sum I named."

"God bless you for that, pirate though you be."

"And Mordecai, I would have given worlds to have brought you back to life, and I tell you now that to see you here now, and know that you are not dead is the happiest moment of my existence."

"And why?"

"Because I have met and known your parents, your innocent, beautiful sister and honest brother, and know how they will feel to welcome you back."

"Could I but believe this?"

"You can, for they will welcome you with open arms."

"Captain Brazos, you see by my presence here that I did not die under your sentence of death."

"I took the leap, thus expiating any wrong I did to you in allowing Rodriguez to go as I did."

"But though I sunk deep into the sea, I managed to rise to the surface and, unhurt, I struck out to save my life and reached the shore."

"For a long time I have lived among the fishermen on the Maine Coast, but at last determined to come home, and I walked here from Boston."

"I dared not to go home, but came here, hoping to see my sister in the morning and ask her if you had been here to see them and hand over the money."

"Somehow I felt that you had done so, and at the same time had not betrayed me as a pirate."

"I was startled at seeing this tomb, to find my name upon it, and you know the rest."

"Mordecai, again I tell you that I am more than happy at finding you alive."

"To prove it, I will tell you that I erected that monument to your memory."

"You?"

"Yes."

"And why?"

"To win the friendship of those who love you, and I thank Heaven my hands are not stained with your blood!"

"You are a strange man, Captain Brazos."

"Mordecai!"

"Yes, sir."

"Here I am known as Captain Carlos Conrad, a planter on the Gulf coast, and also an owner of several merchant vessels."

"Now I have a proposition to make to you."

"Yes, sir."

"Go from here to the highway to Boston, at the creek three miles from the village."

"Why?"

"I will tell you."

"I will come there for you in a carriage, on my way to Boston, within an hour, and picking you up, carry you on to the city with me."

"I feel that I can wholly trust you now, as you can me, and I wish your aid."

"I have much to make known to you—much that I will ask you to do."

"It will not be right for you to surprise your people by your sudden appearance, so I will write your sister when I reach Boston, stating that word has come to me from the South that though your vessel was wrecked you were not lost, and will start North by the first packet-ship out of New Orleans for this port."

"This will break the shock, and you can come home in different style from what you are now appearing in, for my purse is yours."

"Captain Bra—I beg pardon—Captain Conrad, I feel that I can trust you, for you have ever been kind to me and I have always admired you."

"It is best to do as you say, and I will be guided by you in all as you wish."

"Now what shall be first done?"

"Go to the place I speak of, while I will at once seek the inn, order my carriage and meet you there."

"On our way I can tell you of some strange happenings since I forced you to take that fearful leap, as I believed, to death."

"Discipline on board a pirate craft, Captain Conrad, must be merciless, and I not only will not blame you but forgive you."

"There's my hand on it."

The buccaneer grasped the outstretched hand, and then, after Mark Mordecai had read the inscription upon the monument *in memoriam* of himself, the two walked toward the gate.

Then they parted, the sailor to follow the bridge road around to the highway to Boston, and the Sea-Raider to go toward the tavern.

At a rapid pace he went by the parsonage, gleaming white in the moonlight, and as he looked up to the open window he little dreamed that the eyes of Celine were upon him.

Nor did he suspect that she had seen him come out of the graveyard with another man.

And for a long while did Celine Mordecai lie awake that night and wonder what other secret the mysterious man had, and why he had remained for so long a while in the desolate little cemetery and then come out of it with another person.

But she could not fathom the mystery, and so dropped off to sleep, while the Sea-Raider bade Landlord Berry good-by and drove rapidly away from G—.

At the appointed spot Mark Mordecai was picked up, and then the vehicle rolled on its way at a swift pace, bearing the two men who had so tragically parted, so strangely met.

CHAPTER XLV.

CLEVERLY CAUGHT.

UPON arriving in Boston Mark Mordecai became the guest of the Sea-Raider.

He had heard much that had surprised him from the lips of the buccaneer, and he had vowed to help him in the plot he had in hand.

The letter to Celine was written by the Sea-Raider, to keep her parents, her brother and herself no longer in grief at the suppos-

ed death of Mark Mordecai, and when this had been sent the two men felt greatly relieved.

Upon his return to the city the Sea-Raider repaired to the usual evening resort for the fashionable men about town, and met there Bob Brent.

"You are back on time, Captain Conrad," said Bob Brent.

"Yes, and I found the Sea-Raider all safe."

"I am glad of that; but how long will you be in the city?"

"Only about a week."

"And so will I, for I find I can get a cargo, so will take it and run off as soon as I am loaded, so I will claim you on Thursday night next for a late dinner."

"I will be on board, thank you; but how are you pleased with your rooms?"

"Very much, and I am sure you will like them."

"Doubtless; but could I bring a friend with me?"

"Well, I would rather you would not, as I wish to have a special talk with you, for I have a proposition to make."

"All right, I'll come alone," and the Sea-Raider sauntered off, while Bob Brent muttered:

"Yes, come alone, for nothing shall interfere now in the carrying out of my plan."

"You thought I told the truth when I said I would sail with a special cargo, but I shall sail without freight, go in ballast this voyage, and in getting rid of you, Brazos the Buccaneer, I will make my cruise pay," and smiling grimly at his deep-laid scheme being so near fulfillment, Bob Brent went into the *salon* to try and win a few hundreds in gold.

"I want to get back what this scheme will cost me," he said, avariciously.

Thursday evening came around quite stormy, but at the hour appointed, six o'clock, the Sea-Raider raised the brass knocker upon the door of Bob Brent's house.

A sailor from the schooner acting as his valet let him in, and Captain Brent bade him welcome.

The rooms looked bare and uncomfortable, very little like those of the buccaneer.

But a well-spread table looked tempting, and when they sat down to discuss the dinner the Sea-Raider seemed perfectly at home.

The two men chatted pleasantly together, enjoying their dinner it seemed, immensely, and then turned to a decanter of sherry and their cigars.

The host was most hospitable, and repeatedly filled his guest's glass.

But at last the Sea-Raider seemed drowsy, his conversation became disjointed, and his head suddenly fell back, and he was as motionless as the dead.

Then did Bob Brent spring to his feet, and shaking his fist at the unconscious buccaneer hiss forth:

"Now, curse you, Brazos the Buccaneer, you are in my power!"

"Now it is for me to act, and your time will soon come to die."

As he spoke he walked to the door and called.

The sailor appeared and Bob Brent said:

"Go for the carriage and the men."

"Ay, ay, sir," and the sailor disappeared.

To and fro paced the man who had so cleverly caught the Sea-Raider in his trap, until the sound of wheels was heard without.

Then two men appeared in the doorway, accompanied by the servant.

"There he is, so take him to the carriage and send the vehicle back for me."

"If he should recover consciousness, though I do not think he will, put a knife in his heart."

"Ay, ay, sir," and the man who spoke looked like one to promptly obey his orders.

They enveloped the form of the buccaneer in a blanket and bore it out of the room.

Bob Brent heard the carriage roll away, and he hastily prepared to leave his rooms, and in a short while he was packed up and ready to depart.

The carriage returned and he entered the vehicle with his traps while the sailor cook and valet also got in and the vehicle drove away down toward the India wharf.

It drew up at a lonely wharf, for on account of the rain few persons were out, and a few moments after Bob Brent was on the deck of the schooner which served in the place of his brig.

Entering the cabin he found there the Sea-Raider, who had been heavily ironed, and who was still unconscious.

With the first streak of dawn the schooner cast off from the wharf and spread sail.

Down the beautiful bay of Boston she went at a swift pace, bound on a cruise to the West Indies, for so she had cleared, and many a sailor pointed to her as the old vessel of the Sea-Raider.

Out of the harbor into the open sea and then Bob Brent called out to his servant:

"I have the prisoner brought to me, sir."

It was done, for the Sea-Raider had regained his consciousness and came before his captor loaded with irons and with dark, scowling face.

"Well, Senor Captain Brazos, you have awakened to the fact that I am not one to rob of a vessel and to force to serve you when I wished to do so no longer?" and Bob Brent laughed.

"What is your purpose regarding me?"

"To hang you, then take this craft and look up the brig, for I will not be suspected by Senor Morales, as he knows the schooner, and I have on board seventy good men to seize the vessel with."

"My dear Captain Bob, you are a fool."

"Sir!"

"I repeat it, for you have simply shipped my own men, for all of them are in my pay, and you are my prisoner, not *I yours*!"

"See here!"

As the Sea-Raider spoke he shook his chains loose and stepped before the amazed and terrified captain a free man, while he held a pistol leveled at his heart, and springing down the companionway, half a dozen seamen seized Bob Brent, and in an instant he was in irons.

So dazed he was that he could not speak, and he was chained to a ringbolt in the cabin, while the Sea-Raider said:

"I knew that you were as treacherous as a snake, so I put spies upon your track, and knew your game to kidnap me from the first."

"The seventy men you think you have here are but twenty shipped at my command and in my pay."

"Now, Captain Brent, I shall sail to find the brig, for I sent her on a mission of importance, and when we find her I shall give you a surprise that will cause you to wish you had never been born."

With this the Sea-Raider went on deck, and gave orders to the mate what course to steer.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE SEA-RAIDER WINS HIS GAME.

"SAIL HO!"

From the masthead of the schooner came the cry, and it brought the Sea-Raider from his cabin.

A look through his glass and he said:

"That is the vessel we seek."

"It is the brig."

"Yes, sir, I recognize her now," answered the mate.

"Signal her, and we will see if all is as I hope it is."

The signals were set and answered from the brig, and within a couple of hours more the two vessels lay but a cable's length apart, and a boat was making its way from one to the other.

As the boat touched the schooner's side Senor Morales sprung on board followed more slowly by a person who was aided by two of the men, and who appeared to be an invalid.

"Thank Heaven, Captain Brent, you are here, for I greatly feared for you, as I knew how desperately you were wounded."

"I am all right, Captain Brazos, only still weak, and I owe it to the devoted nursing of those you left to care for me."

"When Senor Morales returned in the brig for me, I felt fully able to come, so here I am," said the one who appeared to be an invalid and who was none other than Basil Brent.

"Captain Brent, I told Morales to tell

you the story of your brother's perfidy, that you might be prepared for what was to follow."

"He has done so, sir, and it was hard indeed for me to believe."

"It is true," and I have all the proofs.

"You saved my life when I was sentenced to death, and I am not one to forget it."

"When I saw who it was who was wounded on my decks, I determined to save you if it was in my power."

"You are almost yourself again, and soon will be wholly well."

"I do not wish you to feel that I shall hang your brother, bad as he is, and I have deemed it best to let him take the schooner and a crew with him."

"It can be believed that the craft was lost at sea and all in her, while he can go to some foreign port and sell her, and he has money, so will not go as a poor man, and there need be no infamy set on his name for your sake."

"You I will take to your home, going in my character as Captain Conrad, and you can report that you were the Sea-Raider prisoner and escaped."

"At home there is one who awaits your coming, and I know your life in the future will be a happy one."

"As for the brig I will let Morales take her for his own, if he will promise to devote her to honest trading."

"For myself I have laid a handsome sum by and can still live in my character as Captain Conrad the Planter, for I feel that you will not betray me as at one time a pirate."

"Could I be so base, Brazos?"

"No, it is not your nature; but now let us go into the cabin so that your brother can know that he has come to the end of his rope."

He led the way into the cabin as he spoke, and if he wanted revenge upon Bob Brent, he had it when that wicked man beheld his brother Basil appear before him.

"I know all, Bob, so let us not speak of it."

"Go your way and never cross my path again, for this good man, pirate though he be, allows you to go."

The transfer was soon made, of those who were to go in the different vessels, and while the brig headed back for Boston the schooner went on her way northward and rumor soon had it that Bob Brent had not been lost at sea, as reported, but had turned buccaneer and was sailing the seas, merciless to all in his bitterness against his fellow-men.

The brig did not enter the port of Boston, but a fishing-smack was brought to, and on board of it went Captain Conrad, Basil Brent and Jet, while Senor Morales sailed away in the beautiful vessel, determined to turn her into a South American trader and packet-ship.

It was night when a carriage drove up to the Pot Luck Inn, and from it alighted Captain Conrad, Basil Brent and Jet.

They were greeted by the landlord and Mark Mordecai, who had been apprised of their coming, and Captain Conrad drove at once up to Beacon Hill.

Norma was spending the night with Celine Mordecai, for the two had become great friends, and so the buccaneer found the old commodore alone.

He did not parley at all with him, but said:

"Commodore, I have brought with me to G—none other than Basil Brent, who was severely wounded when he attacked my vessel, and has been under my care ever since."

"His brother Bob is said to have been lost at sea with his vessel, and so Basil returns to his place in Miss Norma's heart."

"What you were, you know that I well understand, and I would tell you that I am aware of far more, for I have discovered that the man Rodriguez was none other than the Cuban whose wife you married."

"You found them captives on the craft of Belmont the Buccaneer, rescued the wife and child, little Norma, and believed that the husband had gone down in the vessel."

"But he escaped in a miraculous way, and he it was that has dogged my steps and placed the gallows monument over Belmont."

"He saw that his wife had married you, so remained silent for her sake, and you

have reared his child to believe you to be her father."

"So be it; I will not undeceive her; I will keep your secret for her sake, especially as her own father is content to have it so."

"And I will go my way in peace; but should we meet in life, remember we are old friends, and must so appear to others."

"I wrote Mark Mordecai, whom you know has returned to his home an honored man, to have your daughter remain with his sister to-night, that I might see you."

"To-morrow she will know that the man she loves is not dead, and all will be well."

"Good-night, commodore."

And he was gone, leaving the old sailor almost speechless with amazement.

CONCLUSION.

A word only to tell of the happenings of some of those who have figured in my story, and this romance is at an end, kind reader.

The rumor that went about that Captain Bob Brent had not been lost at sea, but had turned his schooner into a buccaneer craft, soon was believed by all, and a cruel pirate he was, dreaded upon every ocean.

As for Captain Conrad, he who had been known as the Sea-Raider, having brought happiness to others he went his way, carrying in his heart the one love of his life for Celine Mordecai, while she felt that the old couplet was true:

"It is better to have loved and lost
Than not to have loved at all."

Happy, indeed, was Norma Sprague to have her lover come back to her as though from the grave, and she took the greatest delight in beautifying Overlook Manor, into which they were to move when she and Basil Brent were married.

If she knew of the evil deeds of Bob Brent, she kept the secret to herself.

Mark Mordecai stayed at home for awhile, and then went to sea again as master of a vessel out of Boston, and he seemed like a man who was willing to

"Let the dead past
Bury its dead."

As for the old commodore, he grew more grim as time passed on, and yet seemed to have a haunting fear that some day he would be betrayed by the Red Sea-Raider and the whole truth come out, and if so, that Norma would hate him with all her heart.

So fade from view the characters of my story—a story that has fact for foundation, which goes to prove the saying that

"Truth is stranger than fiction."

THE END.

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BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,

98 William Street, New York.